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TITLE: HIGH TREASON:  
ESSAYS ON THE HISTORY OF THE  
RED ARMY 1918-1938  
  
VOLUME I

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## SUMMARY OF THE BOOK "HIGH TREASON"

High Treason: Essays on the History of the Red Army, 1918-1938, by Vitaly Rapoport and Yuri Alexeev, is a newly translated monograph of two dissident Soviet authors writing in Moscow in the 1970's. The book carries the reader through the period of the Civil War, the turbulent Party struggles of the twenties, the purges of the military forces in the thirties, and the tragic consequences of purges in the early part of the war with Hitler.

The Western reader will find more than a recitation of Soviet history, much of which has been previously published in the West. This is a book written with anger and remorse, powerfully condemning Stalin and the Soviet party system under Stalin. In particular, it accuses Stalin and his henchmen of the betrayal of the Soviet Fatherland and the Red Army.

Western historians are familiar with many events and developments described in the book, but the reliability of original sources of this knowledge is not uniform. Some events have been well researched, documented, and analyzed while others have been only roughly sketched out in sources of varying reliability and in different monographs. In particular, there is no single history of the early days of the Red Army published in the West. In this respect, Rapoport and Alexeev's book is invaluable as it brings together the early history in a single well-integrated narrative. The book also brings to light new facts and offers new interpretations of known developments, such as Stalin's role in the Polish campaign, early purges of Soviet military academics and theoreticians, and the role played by Stalin's cronies from Civil War days. The book also offers numerous fascinating anecdotes--most of them unverifiable but credible.

The book is invaluable in yet another respect as it was wholly researched and written in Moscow and thus represents the knowledge and understanding of history and attitudes toward Party policies on the part of some intellectuals. We do know how effective Soviet censorship is in suppressing the knowledge of certain historical developments and in distorting and rewriting of others, and it is, therefore, fascinating to learn that the efforts of the censor have not been fully successful.

The identity and background of the authors is intriguing. The authorship is ascribed to Vitaly N. Rapoport and Yuri Alexeev. Rapoport, a professional engineer with a military history background, recently immigrated to the United States. The name Yuri Alexeev is said to be a pseudonym for a professional military historian still living in the Soviet Union. According to Rapoport, Alexeev had access to classified Soviet military archives which would account for the large number of other source documents used in the book.

Whatever the conditions surrounding the development of the book, the authors clearly believe in the necessity of bringing their message to the Soviet people regardless of the personal costs. Their actual statement of objectives is: "to reach conclusions vital to us (Soviets), to our children and to our grandchildren". Throughout the book, the authors make clear that these "conclusions" relate to the evils of unrestrained power in the hands of a leader or political party and the necessity of the people, the elite, the military, and other groups to act as restraints on the exercise of power by the Party and its leadership.

The book does differ from most dissident literature by focusing on the damage inflicted by Stalin on the Red Army. The many historical sketches of military leaders of the period and the detailed discussions of military strategy indicate that the authors are directing their book to an audience of professional military people and others with an interest in military history. The book is very sympathetic to the Red Army military professionals and hostile to the political party and the political generals of the period. Professional military leaders making contributions to the strategy, operations, organization, and training of the Red Army are generally treated as heroes and patriots. The complicity of many of these officers in repressive measures of the Party against the people is generally passed over without comment (as in the case of Tukhachevskii). However, high-ranking officers close to Stalin are generally treated with disdain. The authors leave no doubt about their belief that the Army leaders of the period could have and should have taken action to resist Stalin's purge of the officer corps. The implication is clear that current Army leaders should be alert to prevent similar occurrences.

The mechanisms by which political dictatorship arise are first illustrated in the book by reviewing the steps by which Stalin gained complete sovereignty over the Russian Communist Party. The authors portray Stalin as an "exceptional political strategist" and by implication show the weakness of the party system by which the leaders in the 1920's were trying to govern the country.

Stalin first combined with Zinov'ev and Kamenev to weaken Trotskii's political position. Within three years he formed a coalition with the other major group (headed by Bukharin) to destroy the political power of Zinov'ev, Kamenev, and Trotskii. Within another two years (1929) Stalin "redirected his fire" at the Bukharin group and at the 16th Party Congress (1930) arranged the "political liquidation" of Bukharin and other opposition leaders (Rykov, Tomskii, and others).

In these conflicts the power of the Red Army to influence events was carefully neutralized, first by Zinov'ev and later by Stalin and supporting political factions. High command was first transferred from Trotskii to Frunze. After the death (the authors claim murder) of Frunze, the high command was passed to Voroshilov, a political creature of Stalin with a checkered military career in the Civil War. Voroshilov's appointment was accompanied by major shifts in military commands that would have hindered coordinated action by the Army during the critical Party congress. Thus, while principal professional military leaders, such as Tukhachevskii, were not pleased with these events, they did nothing. "The Army still did not suspect what awaited it . . .".

Through all of the Party upheaval, Stalin had not forgotten the Army -a potential center of power that could endanger his mastery of the State. He moved carefully against the top military leaders, suggesting some concern that resistance by the Red Army was still possible. The military leaders were separated from their forces on various pretenses and then arrested: Tukhachevskii was in the city of Samara to assume a new command, Iakir was in transit to Moscow to attend a special session of the Military Council, and so on.

The proceedings leading up to the destruction of the eight accused military leaders are subject to considerable question. The authors indicate that a closed trial took place where the accused were judged by their peers. Some Western scholars believe that no such trial occurred. And yet, the authors' development of the subject, including verbatim testimony, offers new evidence of a trial. Also the rationale offered

for this form of trial appears reasonable. The authors suggest that Stalin, in order to avoid any future political liabilities, wanted "the Army to judge the Army". The credibility of the trial is further strengthened by the observation that "in the surviving typed report of the trial, 'noes' (of the accused) were corrected in ink to 'yeses'".

After conviction and execution of the accused there followed a general slaughter of military officers from the top down to company grade. The authors provide a list of top-ranking officers showing that of the top 899 top-ranking officers, 643 were arrested and 583 perished. The official total of military officers purged in this period is given at 20,000 to 25,000. The authors also indicate that other sources put the number at 100,000, including both military and political officers. The list of names of high-ranking officers purged during this period should be invaluable. Little information on these officers is to be found in published Soviet reference books, especially information about the manner of death.

The authors attempt to answer perhaps the most significant question relating to these events: Why did not the accused leaders (both political and military) resist more effectively the repressions of Stalin? For the political leaders, the authors suggest that they were so closely identified with the Bolshevik party and its bloody rule after the Civil War that they basically "had no path back to the people".

The Army leaders were in a stronger position. They had command of military forces, and as the authors suggest, the Army could win any conflict with the police forces. And yet they made no effort at rebellion against the Party. In addition to a failure of moral courage, the authors contend that there were other factors. They suggest that Iakir was a true idealist and believer in the revolutionary cause. He could not attack Stalin without attacking the Party and the cause, which were dearer to him than his safety. They suggest another set of motives for Tukhachevskii. He was supposedly very egocentric and filled with self-pride. Since all his honors and position flowed from the Party and the system, he could not attack them without destroying the things he loved most.

The authors provide many other chapters that describe the historical development of the Red Army and clearly indicate what they consider to be what is good and bad in the officer corps. In keeping with recent Soviet scholarship about the Civil War, the authors give primacy to the Red Army (RKKA) activities on the Eastern Front and the Eastern Front commanders who formed the real professional core of the RKKA in the postwar period. In contrast, the authors degrade the reputation of some commanders and units that emerged during the Civil War, particularly the cavalry leaders who subsequently ran the Red Army. These included: K. E. Voroshilov (1925-1940), S. K. Timoshenko (1940-1941), and A. A. Grechko (1967-1976). Others reaching deputy ministerial rank included S. M. Budennyi, G. I. Kulik, and others who ultimately proved inadequate: "Only when actual combat began (Fatherland War) was the unfitness of (these leaders) revealed".

The authors devote a number of chapters to the development of the background accomplishments and fate of important military figures in the Civil War and post-Civil War periods. It is in these dramatic presentations that one of the important themes of the authors is disclosed to the reader.

The story of Mironov is among the most revealing of the authors' intentions. The authors present summaries from a suppressed historical essay of S. Starikov and R. Medvedev which is said to contain genuine documents of the time. Mironov was a Cossack military leader who believed strongly in the ideals of the Revolution and

contributed significantly to the Red Army's victories in the Donbass area during the Civil War. He recruited forces and achieved a series of victories; however, he was considered politically unreliable by the authorities because "he put the ideals of freedom ahead of any party programs".

These pictures provide the relief against which is played out the major theme of the book--the large measure of responsibility of Stalin and his followers for the disasters experienced by the Party, the Army, and the people at large. The authors shed few tears for the elimination of individual members of the Party by Stalin in the 1920's and 30's.

Modernization of the Red Army and creation of the modern defense industry in the early 1930's is discussed by the authors against the background of rapid industrialization launched by the First Five Year Plan and forced collectivization. Adopting the idea of by then discredited Preobrazhensky, "primitive socialist accumulation", Stalin created an effective mechanism of extracting from peasants the food needed for urban industry and the Army. The cost of collectivization was enormous: 10 million human lives by Stalin's own admission as well as huge losses of livestock.

The authors' description and analysis of collectivization is not as well balanced as that offered by current Western and Soviet scholarship. However, as is the case in many other parts of the book dealing with nonmilitary issues, the description of collectivization and industrialism is invaluable for its perception of these developments by postwar historians writing under Soviet conditions. It must be recalled, for instance, that almost all of the evidence and records of the famine that accompanied the forced collectivization was removed from official Soviet history.

The authors also go to considerable lengths to discount Stalin's military reputation. Stalin's role in the Civil War as the political representative of Moscow in various theaters of the conflict is presented as a series of efforts to gain personal power at the expense of military operations. Stalin is pictured as siding with the partisan units and imprisoning and executing many regular Army officers with consequent reduction in the performance of the Army units. Stalin's role on the Polish front in 1920 is described as interfering with the capture of the main objective (Warsaw).

The major debunking of Stalin's military reputation concerns his behavior immediately before and during the "Fatherland War". In addition to having almost fatally weakened the Army through the purge of the military leadership, Stalin is pictured as not being alert to the imminence of a German attack in 1941 and exhibiting a lack of understanding of the proper strategy for meeting such an assault. The first source of the catastrophe is laid to the incompetence of the Kremlin leadership, characterized as "a collection of selfish, incompetent and simply ignorant men gathered at the feed troughs of a great power". The "Stalins, Molotovs, Malenkovs, and Berias. . . (were thinking) only about how to solidify and increase their own power".

As a result of this inaction, the Soviet Army was taken by surprise by the German assault in June 1941. Forward units of the Army were quickly destroyed or sent backward in disorganized retreat, so that commanders often lost control of their troops. Stalin's behavior at this time is held up for special scorn. "Stalin, as tyrants often are, was a coward." "He secluded himself in his Kremlin apartments and got drunk." For eight days he remained in this condition; then his associates coaxed him out. The events of this period described in Khrushchev Remembers also corroborate this version.

The authors' concentration on Stalin and the shortcomings of his military leadership combined with a somewhat overstated opinion of the patriotism-inspired strength of the Soviet soldier may have also distracted the authors from a more balanced analysis of the defeat of the Red Army in the early phase of the war.

Having fully revealed the crimes of Stalin and his henchmen, the authors reflect on the fact that the guilt must be shared by everyone in the Soviet Union. They indicate that "there is something not quite right with ourselves . . . it is toleration of evil and submissiveness to unjust authority". In a chapter entitled "Personality in History" the authors reject the notion that Stalin was the critical determinant of Soviet post-revolutionary development. "The system gave birth to Stalin. Not otherwise." Lenin had concentrated power at the center and had allowed the development of a powerful Apparatus that under Stalin would crush the Party. The people's willingness to accept strong leadership together with "insignificant development of legal consciousness, servile docility . . . greatly increased the chances that such a personality would emerge".

The authors believe that it was unlikely that other leaders could have acted much differently than Stalin and still retained power. However, the authors make a call for greatness in each individual: "Even if we accept the existence of historical predestination, still every statesman, every man in general, has the choice to be a weapon of the inevitable or not." The authors see a hope only in the purging of the past by telling the full truth. "The spiritual rebirth of the country is impossible while evil remains hidden away, unjudged, while the triumphant lie paralyzes our will, devours our soul, and lulls our conscience."

In this manner, the authors end their history of the Red Army. They have provided a document that could have an impact both in the Soviet Union and in the West. In particular, the document illuminates political-military relationships of the past and provides some insights into the future. The book's major theme is that the tragedy that overtook the Red Army prior to 1939 must not be allowed to happen again. It suggests that the duty of current military leaders is to prevent irresponsible use of power by the Party leaders for the protection of the Army and the people at large. This view appears consistent with the stronger role that has been played by the Army since Stalin, especially at times of transfer of political power.

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HIGH TREASON

Essays in the History of the Red Army

1918-1938

Volume I

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"Treason is the most serious crime against the people." Constitution of the USSR, 1977, art. 62.

"Naked truth breeds hatred."

Tred'iakovskii

"Can we not praise the Fatherland without inventing miracles in its honor?"

Anonymous publicist for Orel, 18th century

"It is vain in years of chaos

To seek a good end.

It is one thing to kill and repent,

Another to end with Golgotha."

Pasternak



Prolog

On the Eve of Catastrophe



This is what they said before their execution.

Army Commander Ion Iakir: "Long live Stalin!"

Marshall Mikhail Tukhachevskii: "You are shooting not us, but the Red Army."

Both proved to be prophets. Stalin reigned another decade and a half, and in the next year or two after Tukhachevskii's death the high command of the Red Army was destroyed almost to a man, losses unthinkable in the heaviest military campaign. Men who had created the Red Army, who had led it to victory in the civil war and had turned it into the best army in Europe, fell victim to this Bartholomew's Night.

A short while later German tanks roared to the outskirts to Moscow, while "the most brilliant commander of all times and all nations," Stalin, feverishly considered plans to save himself.

Almost twenty years had to pass before the destruction of our army was recognized as a crime. And no one was ever punished. The greater part of the facts and details have not been publicized, nor has anything been said even to this day about how this could have happened.

To remain silent about this is to abuse the memory of the innocent dead. To be silent is to betray the interests of the Motherland. Without the publication of such tragic events, without a merciless analysis of them, it is impossible to reach conclusions vital to us, to our children, and to our grandchildren. Otherwise there is no reason to study history.

Our aim is not to call for revenge or retribution. It is not yet in our power to give an exhaustive historical analysis. That will be the task of our descendants who will have the necessary documents. This is a history of what is already known, although not with absolute certainty.

This book is awkward and confused, with many gaps and much vagueness; it does not claim to be academic. It is only a reminder of a great tragedy. It is a small stone at the foundation of a future memorial to the Army that was shot in the back.



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## Chapter 1

### Assembly on Nikolskaia

Nikol'skaia Street is especially rich in historical monuments.

A Moscow tour guide, 1903.<sup>1</sup>

The incident with which we begin our story occurred on Nikol'skaia Street, the oldest street in the Kremlin settlement, Kitaigorod. It was along this street, already seven centuries old, that the roads to Vladimir, Suzdal', and Rostov Velikii (the Great) once led from the Nikol'skie Gates of the Kremlin.

The air here is filled with Russian history. Moscow's oldest monastery was built on Nikol'skaia in the 13th century; Russia's first book was printed there in the 16th century; it was along Nikol'skaia that Prince Pozharskii pushed the retreating Poles back to the Kremlin; some seventy years later Russia's first institution of higher learning opened on Nikol'skaia.

From ancient times Nikol'skaia had been a center for monasteries and cathedrals, for bookish wisdom and bustling commerce. In the middle of the last century it was one of the main business streets of the city. "Home after home, door after door, window after window, everything from top to bottom was hung with signs, covered with signs as if with wallpaper," wrote Kokorev in his memoirs.<sup>2</sup> At the turn of the century it was filled with expensive commercial buildings. It was the first street in Moscow to be paved with asphalt.

In the days of the October revolution the street saw battles between the Reds and cadets. Under war communism it fell briefly quiet, but with the advent of NEP it once again hummed with trade and commerce. As before it teemed with warehouses, stores, and offices. But a change in its fate was already creeping upon it, standing in the wings. The Slavianskii Bazaar had already been given into the care of various Soviet organizations headed by

Osoaviakhim.<sup>3</sup> A famous hotel, in whose restaurant Russian composers had feted Dvorak, closed its doors. Stanislavskii had sat there with Nemirovich over wine and hors d'oeuvres for more than a day discussing the founding of the Khudozhestvennyi (Art) Theater. The upper rows of shops, more than a quarter of a kilometer long, glass-roofed, built in the old Russian style, was turned into GUM, the State Universal Store. Tsentroarkhiv was moved into the Holy Synod's Press, Chizhovskii Court became quarters for the Revolutionary Military Council. But these were just minor changes.

1932 brought the reconstruction of Moscow, which struck Nikol'skaia no less forcefully and painfully than earlier fires. Its former name was lost; it became 25 October Street. At the same time many of its remarkable buildings were razed. The Kazan Cathedral with its miraculous icon of the Kazan Mother of God disappeared. In place of the cathedral which had been erected by Prince Pozharskii to mark the end of the Polish invasion, there is now a lawn and a public toilet. Practically nothing remains of the Zaikonospasskii monastery, in which Simeon Polotskii had founded the first higher ecclesiastic school in 1682, the Greek-Slavic-Latin Academy. The great Lomonosov, the mathematician Magnitskii, the poets Kantemir and Trediakovskii, the geographer Krasheninnikov had all studied there. The founder of the Academy had been buried in the sacristy amidst the magnificent church plate.

The ancient buildings of the Nikol'skii Greek monastery with its two churches and the chapel which held the miraculous icon of St. Nicholas the Miracle-Worker also disappeared. The monastery had been founded by Ivan the Terrible. Kantemir was buried in its walls.

The Bogoiavlenskii monastery, founded in 1276 under Prince Danil, was destroyed. Of its five temples only one, the Bogoiavlenskii cathedral, survived. It became home for some shop and stands now without its cupola,

chipped and peeling, deteriorating before one's eyes. In the 1920's a Soviet guidebook had said,

It is one of the finest creations of Moscow baroque. Its stone fretwork is so light and delicate that it gives the impression of lacework. Within the cathedral there are sculpted images ("the coronation of the Mother of God"), which are a great rarity in Moscow's Orthodox churches.

Not a trace remained of the Lower Kazan church of the monastery, which had enclosed the burial vault of the Golitsyn princes, "a whole museum, beautifully representing the whole development of Russian sculpture of the 18th century."<sup>4</sup>

The walls of Kitai-gorod with the Vladimir gates and the nearby cathedral of the Vladimir Mother of God were destroyed. Now the way was clear from the Kremlin to the Lubyanka (Dzerzhinskii Square), from the location of the Soviet government to the home of its main organ - the organ of security.

But the historical role of Nikol'skaia had not ended. At its far end on the left-hand side, facing from the Kremlin, beyond the Ferrein pharmacy there remained an unimposing three-story building. Built in 1830, it was famous only for the fact that Stankevich had lived there a long while and Belinskii had been a frequent visitor. On the morning of 11 May 1937 a meeting began in that building. The ranks and responsibilities of the men who met there suggest that this was a meeting of the highest military leaders of the country: Deputy People's Commissars of Defense, the Chief of the General Staff, military district (okrug) commanders, department chiefs of the People's Commissariat, four of the five Marshals of the Soviet Union, all four Army Commanders first-class, a flag officer of the fleet first-class, four Army Commanders second-class . . .

If a few details are added, the picture changes. A meeting was going on, but it was the sort of meeting that military officers have only rarely to attend. One group in full dress uniforms was seated at a long table. The second group, in military uniforms from which all decorations and medals had been torn, sat behind a barrier. This took place in the building of the Central Military Procuracy.

It seems natural now that Military Jurist of the Army First-Class V. V. Ul'rikh, Chairman of the Military College of the Supreme Court of the USSR sat at the head of the table. He is a famous man. In the twenties he chaired the trial of Savinkov. Just recently in August 1936 and January 1937 he had conducted the infamous "Moscow trials" with Vyshinskii.<sup>5</sup> His colleagues in this meeting were: Army Commander Second-Class Ia I. Alksnis, Deputy People's Commissar and Commander of the Air Force (VVS); Marshal V. K. Bliukher, Commander of the Separate Far Eastern Army of the Order of the Red Banner; Marshal S. M. Budennyi, Deputy People's Commissar and Inspector of the Cavalry; Division Commander E. I. Goriachev, Commander of the 6th Cossack Cavalry Corps named for Comrade Stalin; Army Commander Second-Class P. I. Dybenko, commanding the Leningrad Military District; Army Commander Second-Class N. D. Kashirin, commanding the North Caucasus Military District; Army Commander First-Class B. M. Shaposhnikov, Deputy People's Commissar and Chief of the General Staff. Of the eight military judges, seven, unlike Ul'rikh were new in their roles and uncomfortable, possibly from lack of experience. All of them were illustrious commanders of the Red Army and among its distinguished organizers.

The same is true even to a greater degree of those on trial. One has only to leaf through any history of the civil war published before 1937 or after 1956 to find their names, usually linked with the most complimentary

epithets. There were eight of them also: A. I. Kork, Army Commander Second-Class, Superintendant of the Frunze Academy; Corps Commander V. M. Primakov, deputy commander of the Leningrad Military District; Corps Commander V. K. Putna, military attache in England; Marshal M. N. Tukhachevskii, until May 11, 1937 the first Deputy People's Commissar and Chief of Combat Preparedness of the Red Army (RKKA), and until May 26 commander of the Volga Military District; Army Commander First-Class I. P. Uborevich, commander of the Belorussian Military district; Corps Commander B. M. Fel'dman, Chief of the Central Administration (Glavnoe upravlenie) of the RKKA; Corps Commander R. P. Eideman, chairman of (Osoaviakhim); Army Commander First-Class I. E. Iakir, commander of the Kiev Military District.

Except for the People's Commissar, Marshal K. E. Voroshilov, the whole high command of the Red Army was present. Several observers were as highly ranked as the others present: Marshal A. I. Egorov, Deputy People's Commissar, who was responsible for maintaining order in the court; Flag Officer of the Fleet First-Class V. M. Orlov, Deputy People's Commissar and Commander of the Navy; Division Commander M. F. Lukin, Military Commandant of the City of Moscow . . .

Despite the similarity of titles and service records of the judges and the defendants there was an important difference between them, one that had been noted long before. Those on trial were the cream of the army intelligentsia, authors of fundamental scholarly works, pathbreakers of new ways to organize the Army and pioneers of new methods of armed combat. The others, with the exception of Shaposhnikov and Alksnis, were intrepid warriors and swash-bucklers, strangers to theoretical research, reactionaries and careerists. Although they were all exceptionally brave men, their intellectual levels were

clearly unequal, and their views on the majority of military questions were diametrically opposed. We will show below that the composition of the two groups was not accidental and that it was not only disagreements about the future development of the army that led them to this hall.

June 11, 1937. Some of the leaders judge, others are judged. In a very short time most of the judges will lose their lives in very similar circumstances. For some this will happen in just a few months, for others in a year or two. It is possible that some of them sense this. But we had not better jump ahead.

Why were the honored commanders being tried? It is still hard for us four decades later to answer that question. Contemporaries were in an even more difficult position. The following announcement appeared in the papers that day:

IN THE PROCURACY OF THE USSR

The case of those arrested at various times by the NKVD  
(there followed the names of those now familiar to us) . . .  
they are accused of violating their military oaths, of  
treason against the Motherland, of treasons against the  
peoples of the USSR, of treason against the RKKA.

Investigative materials have established the  
participation of the accused, and also of Ia. B. Gamarnik,  
now deceased by suicide, in antigovernment associations with  
leading military circles of a foreign state, which conducts  
an unfriendly policy toward the USSR. In the service of the  
military intelligence of that state, the accused  
systematically provided military circles with information  
about the condition of the Red Army, carried out acts of



sabotage to weaken the strength of the Red Army, attempted to ensure the defeat of the Red Army in case of a military attack on the USSR, and had as their goal the reestablishment of the power of landlords and capitalists in the USSR.

All of the accused admitted their full guilt to charges against them.

The case will be heard today in a closed session of the Special Court of the Military College of the Supreme Court of the USSR: (there followed the composition of the court).

The case will be heard in accordance with the law of December 1, 1934.

That was all Soviet citizens could learn from the papers. This announcement was the only one to appear about this trial.

We will refrain for the time being from an analysis of the document, but we note the very obvious roughness of the style, which permits us to surmise that it was hastily written. We will summarize briefly the main points: the accused were agents of foreign intelligence (espionage and subversive activity); they prepared the defeat of the country in war and the overthrow of the government (treason against the state); the sentence, in all probability, would be passed that very day. The phrase, "The case will be heard today," suggests this. Otherwise it would have read "will begin." The reference to the law of December 1, which provided for accelerated procedure for trials of enemies of the people, supports this interpretation.

And that is how it was. The sentences were passed on June 11 and carried out that day and the next. The trial was not covered in the press, not then, not later. Therefore the public, and inner party circles as well, remained

ignorant of it. In this way in just a few hours the flower of the command of our army was condemned without appeal.

Let us try to reconstruct the trial. The information we will use is fragmentary and exists only in stories transmitted by word of mouth. Not all can be verified. Sometimes we will have to deal with myths, but we will not scorn them. Our people are necessarily a great creator of myths, because much of our history is concealed from us. Myths are not arbitrary fabrications. Their foundations are real, and in this case more often than not they are bloody.

The trial began at 10:00 A.M. The charges were just as imprecise as in the newspaper, although more involved. No documents or other material evidence was introduced at the trial.

The charges against three of the accused are rather well known. Tukhachevskii: organization of revolution to overthrow of the government, association with German intelligence, and moral degradation (this is what a weakness for the fair sex is usually called in official papers).

Iakir was also accused of attempting to overthrow Soviet power and of associating with Germans. In his case there were specific details, but they were not entirely clear. Iakir was incriminated by association with his subordinate, D. A. Shmidt, who had been arrested in 1936. Shmidt had been commander of what was then the only heavy tank brigade in the RKKA. According to one story, Iakir ordered Shmidt to keep the brigade prepared to move against Moscow. In another version he ordered him to destroy his equipment or to render it useless. It is unclear which of these contradictory accusations was brought against the Army Commander. All that is known is that Shmidt, according to the People's Commissar of the NKVD, made both statements, or rather signed them.

Uborevich was accused, in part, of intentionally having left breaches in the border defenses of Belorussia, the construction of which he had overseen, to make it easier for the enemy to break through. It is true that there were breaks in the line, but they were related to local conditions. In the area of Pinsk, for example, defensive works were moved back behind impenetrable swamps, which of course strengthened them. When Shaposhnikov, a member of the court, asked Uborevich why that had been, however, chairman Ul'rikh disallowed it as a leading question.

As far as is known the other defendants were charged with working for German intelligence and deliberately weakening the combat strength of the Red Army.

All eight pleaded not guilty to all charges. In the surviving typed report of the trial their "noes" were corrected in ink to "yeses." An exception was made only for Tukhachevskii, who refused to answer any further questions. The other seven continued to deny everything during the interrogation. Toward the end of the session Iakir, who was known for his unparalleled bravery and self-control, could not contain himself. He shouted at his former comrades-in-arms, "Look me in the eyes! Can you really not understand that this is all lies!" Primakov, who was sitting beside him, tried to restrain him, "Give it up, Ion. Don't you see who we are dealing with here . . .?" Iakir asked nonetheless for paper and wrote letters to Stalin and Voroshilov.

Several members of the court became unwell during the proceedings. Shaposhnikov, who tried with his question to give Uborevich a chance to acquit himself, clearly felt uncomfortable. Bliukher claimed to be indisposed and left the hall. He was absent for most of the interrogations but returned before sentence was passed.

Budennyi on the other hand was unrelenting. In the course of the session he sent a report to People's Commissar Voroshilov, in which he called the defendants "all swine" and "enemies" and complained that none had confessed. This report has been preserved.

By two o'clock it was all over. The sentence, which could not be appealed, was the same for all: capital punishment. The convicts were led away to Lubyanka.

Army Commander Iakir was shot that day. The others were shot at dawn on June 12. Their bodies were taken to Khodynka to a place where construction work was going on. In an area cordoned off by soldiers of the Red Army they were dumped into a trench, covered by quicklime and buried.<sup>6</sup>

A quarter century earlier the field camp of the Aleksandrovskii Cadet Academy, at which Tukhachevskii had studied, was located at Khodynka.

*(The break in pagination is of no significance.)*

## Chapter 2

### Discord in the Face of Danger

In 1936 Mikhail Tukhachevskii reached the peak of his service career. On April 4 he was appointed First Deputy People's Commissar of Defense and Chief of Combat Preparedness of the RKKA. Other events preceding these promotions testify to the steady rise of Tukhachevskii's official position and of his influence. In the summer of 1931 he had become Deputy People's Commissar and Chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council, and Chief of Ordinance of the RKKA. In 1933 on February 21 he was awarded the Order of Lenin, and on November 7 it was he who reviewed the parade of troops on Red Square - a rare distinction, as that was usually done by the People's Commissar. At the 17th Congress of the Communist Party in 1934 Tukhachevskii delivered a speech and was elected candidate member of the Central Committee. In November 1935, when personal military ranks were reintroduced, Tukhachevskii was among the first five to receive the highest rank, Marshal of the Soviet Union. He traveled to England in February 1936 to attend the funeral of King George V and successfully carried out his mission, which went beyond simply representing the Soviet Union. The forty-year-old Marshal and the film he presented on massive airborne landings impressed the English. Even skeptics like General Bell acknowledged they were impressed by Tukhachevskii's pet forces, the airborne troops. On his return trip Tukhachevskii stopped in Paris for talks with General Gamelin, the Chief of the French General Staff. Soon after his return he was appointed to another high post, which had been created especially for him.

All, it would seem, was well. But behind the scenes, where so much that is important in Russian affairs takes place, things were not so rosy. The

problem was that Stalin had never particularly liked Tukhachevskii. During the struggle for power he had forced Tukhachevskii to accept a demotion from his post as Chief of Staff of the RKKA to command the Leningrad Military District. When he had consolidated his power, Stalin permitted Tukhachevskii to return to the central apparatus of the People's Commissariat and even to move higher. We cannot know with absolute certainty what Stalin's logic or his motives may have been, but we can make educated suppositions, which the reader will find in the third part of the book.

In 1931 Tukhachevskii was brought back from his Leningrad exile, which had lasted three years. In his new role he quickly became exceptionally and productively active. He initiated, defended, and supported the development of new weapons that later became the basis of the Red Army's strength. The most modern airplanes; the T-34, which turned out to be the best tank in the Second World War; airborne troops; unique research and pioneering work in radar, rocketry, and jet-propelled weaponry. All were among the fruits of this work. We are omitting details, because all of this is elaborated in memoirs and other special literature. What is important for us to know is that Tukhachevskii worked in this field not because he was enchanted by the technology, but because the technical equipment of the army was a necessary condition for the military doctrine he preached. Tukhachevskii had propounded the theory of deep battle and operations in the early twenties. Over the following decade it had been developed and worked out in detail by a group of his young colleagues. The greatest credit for the final formulation of the doctrine belongs to V. K. Triandafillov and his colleagues in the Ist (operational) Directorate of the RKKA general staff among whom G. S. Isserson stands out.

In just a few years Tukhachevskii had achieved a great deal. At the 17th Party Congress the fiery People's Commissar Voroshilov had proclaimed, "The basic tasks of reconstructing our army have now been accomplished." In 1933 for every Red Army infantryman there were 7.74 horse power. This figure was higher than that for the French, American, or even the English army which was the most mechanized of that time. Of course we ought not rely too heavily on statistics from ceremonial speeches. In the same speech Voroshilov, sagaciously looking back sixteen years, spoke in favor of the horse, since at the end of the First World War there had been over a million of them in the French army, about 880,000 in the German, and in the tsarist army 1,142,000!

While Voroshilov was showing off firing his pistol from the rostrum for effect, Tukhachevskii and colleagues were creating a new army. In two of the most important military districts, the Ukraine and Belorussia, Iakir and Uborevich boldly introduced new principles for training troops, and worked out totally new forms of coordination of land and air units. The Ukrainian maneuvers of 1935 and especially 1936 provoked unconcealed admiration among foreign military observers and shook up military thinking in all of Europe, setting it off in a new direction. At the same time a strong fortified line was being constructed along the western and southern borders of the USSR.

Whatever other military problems Tukhachevskii may have set his mind to, he always remained principally a strategist. Problems of strategic and operational arts were always his favorite food for thought. In the eyes of western specialists Tukhachevskii was first of all a strategist. His turning maneuver around Warsaw in 1920 was highly regarded, despite the failure of the operation as a whole. Even in 1936 while he was hurriedly preparing the Field Manual of the RKKA, Tukhachevskii simultaneously prepared a new edition of his

New Questions of War, which had first been published in 1932.<sup>1</sup> That manuscript is apparently buried in the bowels of the NKVD.

According to G. S. Isserson, ". . . in strategic matters Tukhachevskii stood head and shoulders above many representatives of the higher command of the Red Army." But in the mid-thirties he "did not have direct access to the plan for the strategic deployment of our armed forces, which was worked out in the General Staff." The cadres decided everything. That is why at the head of the General Staff Stalin had put Marshal Egorov, whom he knew from the time of the civil war to be obedient and loyal. Egorov also had a skeleton in his closet, which Stalin might use. Tukhachevskii did not have this merit and therefore could not be admitted.

From the time the fascists came to power Tukhachevskii intently followed developments in Germany. In his work Military Plans of Contemporary Germany<sup>2</sup> he pointed out that the accelerated militarization of the country seriously imperiled peace on the continent. Time was on Hitler's side. His first aim would be to conquer France, but he also posed a major threat to the USSR. In 1935 with the Wehrmacht's strength grown to 849,000, Tukhachevskii warned that the USSR, with a population two-and-a-half times as large as Germany, had an army of only 940,000.

Tukhachevskii's strategy was always offensive - "smashing" (sokrushenie). Now he had urgently to rethink how he could change his strategy to employ it effectively against an enemy that itself tore into battle. That Hitler would attack he had no doubt. Moreover, the attack would come suddenly. Norbert Wiener once noted that in peacetime it is impossible to determine the fitness of generals for the next war. Today those who were successful in the most recent war seem good, while those who had successfully led in the previous war are considered obsolete.<sup>3</sup> Tukhachevskii was a very ambitious man, but he



did not delude himself about his powers. He did not hope to divine the course or even the character of the coming war. Only the opening phases of a war could be predicted, as they were largely determined by the features and factors of peacetime. In his article "The Nature of Border Fighting" Tukhachevskii repudiated the generally accepted idea of "concentrating massed armies at the borders by railroad" because of the vulnerability of railroads to air attack.<sup>4</sup> For the same reason he had to discard the old schemes of mobilization and concentration of armies.

Not long before Tukhachevskii had refuted the idea of A. A. Svechin, the outstanding military writer, that it would be advantageous to fight a strategic defense ("exhaustion" - izmor). Events in Europe suggest that Svechin was right.

New views require verification. But how can new conceptions of warfare be checked out short of going to war? There is a way however imperfect it might be - war games, or as it is more commonly called now, simulation, reproducing the conditions of war. Toward the end of 1935 Tukhachevskii proposed to the General Staff to conduct war games. His idea was accepted, and the games took place in November 1936. They have been mentioned in print only twice. The first article was by G. S. Isserson, whom we have already mentioned, then a brigade commander and the actual director of the Operational Directorate of the General Staff, as well as head of the operations faculty of the General Staff Academy. Isserson worked up the assignments for the games. The second article came from the pen of A. I. Todorskii, who in 1936 was Superintendent of the Air Force Academy.<sup>5</sup> Corps Commander Todorskii commanded an air group (aviasoedinenie) for the "German" side in the games.

The western front of the "Red" forces was commanded by Uborevich, the "German" forces by Tukhachevskii, the "Poles" by Iakir. In setting the

conditions of the games the General Staff tried to base them on the current military-political situation in Europe without trying to peer into the future. The German forces were estimated on the basis of the mobilization formula of 3:1, the existence of 36 divisions in the Wehrmacht, inexact information about the formation of three tank divisions, and an air force that had at its disposal four to five thousand planes. (When the real war began, Germany was able to put 100 divisions under arms and sent 50 to 55 against the USSR in the regions where the games were conducted. The Poles contributed another twenty.) The Kremlin strategists had learned their political lessons well and understood that the capitalists, imperialists, and fascists were one gang. If they weren't for us, they must be against us. The Poles therefore had no choice but to cooperate with the Germans and attack the USSR together.<sup>6</sup>

Even an intelligent and subtle writer like Isserson defended this prognosis eighteen years after the Second World War. "In 1936 there was no reason to suppose that Germany would first swallow Poland whole and end her existence as an independent country. This deprived Germany of the support of a well-organized and trained army that could mobilize more than fifty divisions."<sup>7</sup> Of course the General Staff could not then know that the deal between Hitler and Stalin would lead to the division of Poland. They should, however, have noted that the organization of the Polish army was outdated and their arms obsolescent.

Tukhachevskii objected most of all to the accepted disposition of forces. If Germany could put 92 divisions in the field at the beginning of the First World War, now they could count on 200, otherwise the once beaten Germans would not start a fight. Therefore, Tukhachevskii insisted there would be at least 80 German divisions to the north of the Poles'e. He apparently did not

think much of the Poles. In actuality in 1941 plan Barbarossa threw 79 German divisions against the Soviet Union in the "Center" and "Northern" groups. Altogether on the Eastern Front they had 152 divisions.

Tukhachevskii further insisted that the grouping of German forces between the Narev River and the mouth of the Neman was only a preliminary concentration after crossing over by railroad. He demanded he be permitted, before the operational part of the games began, to deploy his "German" forces to prevent the concentration of the "Reds". He also demanded that he be permitted to strike first. Tukhachevskii believed that German propaganda about the blitzkrieg was not empty boasting. Germany did not have the resources to conduct a long war. Tukhachevskii took seriously the factor of surprise.

Tukhachevskii's thoughts on the course of the early part of the war, as conducted in the games, are also known, although the memoirists don't write about them. Because of the unexpectedness of their attack, the Germans would enjoy tremendous success in the first months, moving 100 to 250 kilometers into Soviet territory. The "Reds" would not be able to carry out a full mobilization of the army or to replace the losses of this initial period. For eight to twelve months they would be forced to fight defensive battles before going over to a decisive counterattack. Tukhachevskii did not expect that in real conditions an attack could come entirely as a surprise. Intelligence and reconnaissance would insure against that. Stalin fully disproved that theory in 1941.

The conditions proposed for the games were exceptionally difficult. They were not derived directly from contemporary assessments of the enemy's strength, but for educational purposes they were justified. As we know, reality was much crueler.

Marshal A. I. Egorov, who by nature was more a clerk than a military commander, was in charge of the games. He had always been a compliant executor of orders from above. In 1905 he dispersed a demonstration in Tbilisi; during the civil war he obediently followed the ignorant command of Stalin, who was then a member of the Military Revolutionary Council of the front; finally on June 11, 1937 on orders from the same Stalin he maintained order at the trial of his comrades. Above all Egorov wanted to display the work of his office in the best light, in this case to show that the plans developed by the General Staff for deployment in case of war were the best plans, the correct and only possible plans. Therefore, with full assurance that the Master would be on his side he discarded Tukhachevskii's sagacious suggestions. Egorov did not want to adopt the methods of Suvorov, who, it had been established, had operated on a "feudal" basis. Nor did he wish to burden himself by learning anything new. The enemy's troops received no strategic advantages: they would have to approach the border after the main Soviet troops had been deployed. This is what Isserson has written:

In the final analysis what happened was that the two sides began the games evenly matched. The main forces of the Red side were deployed along the border. The possibility that we might be able to prevent the concentration of the enemy's forces or that we might strike the first blow were not considered. The factor of surprise and suddenness, to which the Germans attached such great importance and which in their open discussions in the press comprised the main feature of their strategic doctrine, found no expression in the games. In these circumstances, which deprived the games of fundamental strategic meaning, the course of

events led to a frontal clash like the border engagements of 1914 and ended with no decisive outcome.<sup>8</sup>

The circle tightened. The Red Army was ordered to fight according to plans that were twenty-five years old and tragically useless. Todorskii's description of the games agrees completely with Isserson's. A few important details, which have not been previously published, complete the picture.

Before the games began, Tukhachevskii traveled in the border districts to update his information on the German forces. At the same time the games' participants gathered in Moscow: all of the commanders of military districts, chiefs of district headquarters or their assistants, corps commanders, many division commanders. A day before "hostilities" commenced, they met in house #2 of the People's Commissariat of Defense at the intersection of Kuibyshev Street (formerly Il'inka) and Red Square. That evening an important message came: the games were being transferred to the Kremlin. Members of the Politburo wanted to participate in them. The next morning they were all in the Kremlin, except Tukhachevskii. For several hours they waited. When he arrived, Stalin asked what had caused the delay. He was told that because Tukhachevskii was absent, they did not have complete information on the "blue" side, the enemy. Stalin very reasonably noted that we had a General Staff, they could supply the missing information. Egorov and his colleagues worked all night. When the participants gathered again the next morning, Egorov announced his findings.

Germany and Poland would declare their mobilization of 90 and 20 divisions, respectively, and take the offensive. Nor would we be caught napping. We would immediately put 60 mobilized divisions on the border, and within two weeks another 40. A little after that we would advance 20 to 25 more from interior districts. The aggressor would attempt to break through

our lines of defense for two or three weeks but would have no success. The Red Army would launch a crushing counter offensive and carry the war into Poland. Revolts would break out against the fascist regimes in Germany and Poland. It was all like in a song or a report: if tomorrow we're at war, if tomorrow we're on the march . . . with a little blood in a foreign land . . . Stalin nodded approvingly. The commanders received their assignments and set to work with their staffs.

Tukhachevskii finally showed up. All the participants were rounded up again. Stalin asked Tukhachevskii to familiarize himself with Egorov's arrangements and to express his opinion of them. Tukhachevskii replied that his information was different from Egorov's. Germany would mobilize 150 to 200 divisions and would attack the Soviet Union without declaring war. Because of the suddenness of the attack and the numerical superiority of the enemy, we would have to fight a long defensive war on our own territory before we could possibly go over to a counteroffensive.

Stalin reacted curtly, "What are you trying to do, frighten Soviet authority?" The games were conducted according to Egorov's plan.

"Tukhachevskii was clearly disenchanted," wrote Isserson<sup>9</sup> with magnificent understatement. Tukhachevskii understood, he could not help but understand, that on the eve of unavoidable world carnage the defense of the country, its fate, lay in the hands of vain, short-sighted, and ignorant men. We will begin by taking a giant step backward in an attempt to find the causes of the catastrophe which struck the Red Army. The civil war stamped an ineradicable mark on the future development of the new army. In this unusual war, a fratricidal war in which the enemies were not foreign invaders but fellow countrymen, the RKKA was not only born but came of age. It was then

that the traditions, the doctrines, and the relations of the young army to the new political authority took root.

From this eventful period we will take just a few incidents. They have been selected for the light they shed on the personalities of the men who later played decisive roles in shaping the army. We will also touch on negative aspects that have heretofore been purposely ignored or distorted. By this we do not mean to dishonor the Red Army or add glory to its enemies. Who will take it upon himself to be a judge in the tragic internecine war? If we must say something not entirely praiseworthy about some of the leaders of the Red Army, that is not our fault. For too long official Soviet historiography has lied or simply been silent about this. More than enough has already been written about the deeds of their opponents.





## Chapter 3

### 1918: The Birth of the RKKA

The decree establishing the volunteer Workers-Peasants' Red Army was signed by Lenin on January 28, 1918. Four months passed before regular units were formed. Since 1922, however, the anniversary of the creation of the Red Army has been marked on February 23.

The history of how this date came to be chosen deserves a moment's notice. For a long while an official version circulated, which explained that on that day the young Red units received their baptism of fire - they stopped attacking German troops near Narva and Pskov. In the mid-1960s this was refuted in the press.<sup>1</sup> Since then February 23 has been marked as the day of national opposition to the enemy, and the pre-1938 explanation has once again been adopted.

Let us briefly explore the events of that distant period. On February 10, 1918 negotiations at Brest-Litovsk were broken off. The situation for the young republic was desperate. Soviet authorities could do nothing but wait for the German reaction, and on the eighteenth the Germans attacked. Because they did not commit many troops to the offensive, and most of them were militia (Landwehr), the offensive developed slowly. The units of the old Russian army that still occupied the front did not put up an active defense and were easily driven eastward. The Red Army did not really exist yet. On that same day, February 18, the Central Committee of the Communist Party met and after two stormy sessions accepted Lenin's ultimatum on the immediate conclusion of peace on any terms. The Germans were informed.

While the Germans continued their attack and Soviet authorities sued for peace, the formation of Red Guard militia detachments continued. On February

21, Lenin appealed to everyone capable of bearing arms with the slogan "The Fatherland is in peril." For the next ten days factory sirens and whistles of Petrograd sounded the alarm. Practically all the men of the city took up arms. Together with the militia units that had already been formed, the soldiers of the Petrograd garrison and the sailors of the Baltic fleet, they marched off to meet the Germans. They could not, however, mount effectual resistance to the enemy.

The German command, whose major concerns were now in the West, were not seeking to reopen a war with Russia. They hoped only for some easy loot. On the evening of February 22, the Germans occupied Pskov. All was then quiet from the 23rd through the 27th. No battles took place. During the next week a few minor clashes occurred. On March 3, P.E. Dybenko surrendered Narva. That same month he was tried by a military tribunal and removed from his post as People's Commissar for Naval Affairs.

In February of the next year, 1919, a group of women workers from Petrograd wrote to Lenin to suggest commemorating those memorable ten days with a holiday in honor of the "birth of the Red Army." Lenin agreed although he did not evince any particular enthusiasm. In view of the difficult circumstances in which the country still found itself, the holiday was fixed on a Sunday, which in that year happened to fall on the 23rd. As we can see, the choice of the date was to a large extent accidental.

The holiday was not marked in 1920 or 1921. Perhaps little importance was yet attached to it. In 1922 it was entered in the official calendar of saints. It seemed more appropriate to celebrate this rather accidentally born holiday after the victory in the civil war.

One way or another a Red Army Day was necessary. Ideology, however, would not permit that it be celebrated as an anniversary of any, even the most

glorious, victory in the internecine war. The Red Army had to have been born in battle with an external enemy. Starting from this ideological basis, the Entente was declared the chief enemy, and Kolchak, Denikin, Iudenich, Wrangel its agents. Somewhat later Stalinist historiography took that thesis to its logical extreme - all of the civil war was turned into a repulsing of foreign aggression in the form of three separate campaigns of the Entente. In this way the war lost its internecine character and became a defensive struggle, but the common name, the civil war, was retained, possibly through inadvertence. That is why the holiday was kept on February 23. At the dawn of Soviet power there was no other episode associated with the attack of a foreign enemy.

In World War II the story of the holiday was improved. The story about the defeat of German aggressors near Pskov and Narva surfaced in 1938, and in 1942 Stalin spoke of "the destruction of elite German corps and divisions." It was not mentioned, of course, that on February 23 Pskov was already in German hands or that they were still 300 kilometers away from Narva. It is more interesting that Stalin never tried to attach Red Army Day to his own participation in the civil war, for example with the defense of Tsaritsyn.

The Red Army was born. The circumstances surrounding the registration of the birth did not foretell an easy fate.



## Chapter 4

### 1918: Tsaritsyn

Stalin made his first appearance on the civil war battle fields in the spring of 1918. In May near Tsaritsyn, when echelons of the retreating 5th Ukrainian Army under Voroshilov were crossing the Don, Stalin arrived as an extraordinary commissar of supply for South Russia. Later, obliging historians transformed the Tsaritsyn sector into the decisive front of the civil war and proclaimed Stalin as the chief organizer of the Red Army. At the time even Stalin did not know of his destiny. He wrote Lenin on July 7, 1918, "I am driving and berating everyone who needs it. I hope we will soon reestablish [rail communication with the center - authors]. You may be assured that we will spare no one, not ourselves, not others, but somehow we will supply the grain."

At Tsaritsyn Stalin joined the staff of the Military Revolutionary Council of the North Caucasus Military District. Using his high position as a member of the government (he was still People's Commissar for Nationality Affairs), he immediately began to interfere in purely military matters, which he did not understand, (because of ignorance and inexperience). Stalin himself, of course, thought differently. From that same note to Lenin: "If our military 'specialists' (cobblers!) weren't sleeping or doing nothing, the line [railroad - authors] would not have been cut. If the line is reestablished, it won't be because of the specialists, but despite them."<sup>1</sup> It is immediately apparent that Stalin, himself the son of a real cobbler, had no use for military specialists, or that in any case he meant to put himself above them.

On May 2, 1918 Andrei Evgen'evich Snesev, an ex-Lieutenant General of the tsarist army, who had joined the Red Army voluntarily, was appointed commander of the North Caucasus Military District. Snesev was an experienced commander and an outstanding Orientalist. At the end of May he arrived at Tsaritsyn with a mandate from the Council of People's Commissars, signed by Lenin. In a region where partisan operations, and Soviet and Party work were all poorly organized, according to a report by Commissar K. Ia. Zedin,<sup>2</sup> Snesev was to undertake the establishment of regular military units.

Snesev stepped on a lot of toes. Most important, he clashed with a group of Party workers headed by K. E. Voroshilov and S. K. Minin, who did not understand the need for a regular army. Free-spirited guerrilla units, meetings, and the free election of commanders seemed to them the only true methods of revolutionary struggle. The establishment of military discipline looked like a return to "tsarist" ways. The commanders of the numerous partisan detachments held the same view. The leaders of small units of 200 or so men, who liked to call themselves commanders or commanders-in-chief, were mostly soldiers and non-commissioned officers of the old army. They were jealous of the practically unlimited power they had gained over other men. Intuitively they felt that in a regular army they would not retain their commanding positions. Leaders in a regular army would have to be literate and to have at least an elementary military education which many of them did not. History would show that these fears were exaggerated. Old Bolsheviks like Voroshilov and Minin, who had fallen into military work, thought little about careers and felt a class distrust of former tsarist officers.

Stalin momentarily considered the circumstances and supported the partisans. Like a true revolutionary he earned his popularity in the masses.

Moreover, he was always repelled by men like Snesarev who stood on a higher intellectual level.

In these conditions the constructive work of Snesarev and his staff went slowly. When the Cossack units of General Krasnov attacked Tsaritsyn, it required a tremendous effort by Snesarev's units to drive them off and to reestablish communication with the center. Just then, in the middle of July, Stalin with the help of Voroshilov and Minin, arrested almost all of Snesarev's staff officers and incarcerated them in a prison ship. Soon Snesarev was also put under guard. The charge of sabotage against him was unfounded. The local Cheka did not confirm it. But already in 1918 Stalin realized that actual guilt was not the most important element. It was necessary to declare enemies those who had to be removed for other reasons.

The repression affected not only staff offices. This is how Stalin reacted to the news that a monarchistic organization had been discovered:

Stalin's resolution was terse, 'Shoot'. Engineer Alekseev, two of his sons, and together with them a considerable number of officers, some of whom belonged to the organization, and some of whom were only suspected of sympathy with it, were seized by the Cheka and immediately, without a trial, shot.<sup>3</sup>

The quotation is taken from the journal "Don Wave". We might not have believed a White Guard organ, but Voroshilov used this very piece to describe Stalin's style of revolutionary work.

Moscow did not believe Stalin's accusations and sent a commission from the Supreme Military Inspectorate headed by A. I. Okulov. When he learned they were coming, Stalin gave the order to kill the arrested officers. The barge was towed to a deep channel and sunk in the Volga. Several days later Okulov

and his commission arrived and quickly established that the charges against Snegarev were groundless. He was freed and transferred to a different front. The drowned officers were written off as losses in the civil war. No one was brought to account for the "mistake". That was normal for those times.

Strategically Stalin's activity also bore fruit. In the spring of 1918 the Soviets faced two main enemies in the South: the Don Cossacks, and the voluntary officer detachments of Generals L. G. Kornilov and M. A. Alekseev, which had retreated into the Caucasus.

The Cossacks were tired of war and did not wish to fight with anyone, including the Soviets. They reacted unenthusiastically in April when the newly elected ataman Krasnov proclaimed an independent Don state in which he included not only the traditional Cossack territories but also Taganrog, Tsaritsyn, and Voronezh districts. Krasnov himself has recorded that the Cossacks were not up to fighting for new land.<sup>4</sup> But the Bolsheviks' grain requisitioning policies, which they put into effect in the spring of 1918, forced the Cossacks to take up arms.

The Volunteers turned out to be natural allies of the Cossacks. Kornilov and Alekseev planned to lead their officers out of Russia through the Caucasus, to preserve them for a future army. However, the Volunteers, like Krasnov's troops, were very weak. In May Krasnov had 17,000 fighters, many of whom were not reliable, and 21 guns. He was opposed by much larger Red forces: the Southern Screen (Zavesa) with 19,820 infantry and cavalry, and 38 guns; and the 10th Army with 39,465 infantry and cavalry, and 240 guns. The Volunteer forces numbered only 3500 in February, and almost 100 of them were sick or wounded. They rested until March in the southern stanitsas (large Cossack villages) under the protection of the Cossacks. To carry out their plan they had to cross the Kuban peninsula, where their way was blocked by



significant Red Forces: Kalinin's group with 30,000, the Taman Army with another 30,000, and the 11th Army with 80,000 to 100,000. The Red Army's superiority was overwhelming. All of these troops were subordinate to the North Caucasus Military District, whose headquarters had been moved from Rostov to Tsaritsyn because of the Cossack threat.

In April the Volunteers made a desperate attempt to break out. On the 13th, during the storming of Ekaterinodar General Kornilov perished. The Whites under General Denikin retreated to the Don. It seemed that the Reds could very quickly defeat the enemy. They were hindered, however, by the absence of full authority in the hands of the district commander and by the super-revolutionary activity of the district Revolutionary Military Council headed by the recently-arrived Stalin. We have already described his actions; it remains to explain the results.

While Stalin and his comrades were battling the headquarters staff of their army, Krasnov and Denikin were gathering forces. Although relations between them were tense and there was a struggle for supreme command going on, nonetheless in the summer of 1918 the enemies of Soviet government achieved considerable success. By August Krasnov's army consisted of 40,000 reliable soldiers, and his authority stretched across the whole Don Cossack Territory. In May the Volunteer Army, still made up of officer units, included 5000 infantry and cavalry. Denikin destroyed Kalnin's group, occupied the villages of Torgovaia and Velikokniazhenskaia in June, and took Tikhoretskaia on July 13. The strategic position of the Soviet forces in the North Caucasus became critical. Now the Volunteer Army represented a more serious threat. It had 20,000 fighters and was continuously attracting more officers, mainly from the south.

The successes of the Don and Volunteer armies occurred during Stalin's usurpation of military leadership in Tsaritsyn and to a significant extent because of it. Stalin commanded the North Caucasus Military District on his own for two months after Snegarev's removal in the middle of July. It was just then that Denikin began his successful offensive and his army suddenly began to grow. On August 16 he seized Ekaterinodar. By the end of September there were 40,000 soldiers under the White flag.

Having freed himself of Snegarev, Stalin arbitrarily altered the plans for the defense of Tsaritsyn. By the autumn that had seriously endangered the city and almost destroyed the cooperation of Red forces in the South. Stalin also clashed again with the military leadership, this time with former General P. P. Sytin, who had been appointed commander of the Southern Front.

This was a difficult time for the Soviet republic. Lenin lay wounded in his apartment in the Kremlin while Sverdlov and Tsiurupa directed the government. On September 2, a new military organ was created, the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic with L. D. Trotskii at its head. I. I. Vatsetis was appointed the new Commander-in-Chief. Merciless Red terror was proclaimed throughout the country; defensive measures took on new forms; new fronts and armies were established. The Central Committee and the Council of People's Commissars confirmed appointments, but it was the Revolutionary Council that ordered the appointment of front commanders. Sytin was made commander of the Southern Front, which had been formed from the old North Caucasus Military District, but Stalin did not obey Moscow's directive. He sabotaged the order to move the administration of the front to Kozlov, and then by an order of the Revolutionary Military Council of the front he dismissed Sytin as a former tsarist general and replaced him with Voroshilov. Most likely it was not Sytin's past that disturbed Stalin but the power he

received as troop commander. Stalin always took questions of power seriously. Conditions near Tsaritsyn and throughout the Northern Caucasus became so perilous at this time that Moscow had finally to intervene. On October 6, Sverdlov and Stalin exchanged angry telegrams, after which the Central Committee recalled Stalin from the Southern Front and reorganized the Revolutionary Military Council. Voroshilov and Minin were removed. K. A. Mekhonoshin, B. V. Legran, and P. E. Lazimir replaced them.

The new front command set about to clean up the mess Stalin had made. When the Cossacks approached Kamyshin, the Soviet command transferred some of its forces from the Eastern Front to save Tsaritsyn. Sytin defended Tsaritsyn, but he was not able to save anything in the Northern Caucasus. There the front collapsed. Inspired by the example of the Revolutionary Military Council, lower-ranking commanders began to behave in the same independent fashion. Commander of the Taman Army Matveev refused to subordinate himself to the orders of the Kuban-Black Sea Central Executive Committee and was therefore shot by the local Commander-in-Chief Sorokin. In his turn Sorokin sabotaged the formation of regular units of the 11th Army and arrested and shot members of the Kuban-Black Sea government. He was declared an outlaw and fled, but was captured by one of Matveev's comrades who avenged his departed commander. Brigade commander Kochubei, surrounded by Denikin's troops, went over to the enemy with part of his forces. He was, however, hanged on the orders of General Lukomskii.

The whole Northern Caucasus fell into the hands of the Volunteer Army, and Denikin became an enemy to be reckoned with for another two years.



## Chapter 5

### 1918-1919 : The Eastern Front

However important were the events being played out at Tsaritsyn, in the spring of 1918 the main front for the Soviet republic was the Eastern. And so it continued to be until the summer of 1919 when Kolchak was decisively defeated in the battle for the Urals. Nonetheless, until recently the importance of this front has been intentionally depreciated. That was because Stalin, Voroshilov, and other comrades-in-arms of the Great Leader either participated very little or not at all on the Eastern Front. According to the official historiographical concept of the war, Stalin was always sent to the decisive sectors of the civil war.

Now, however reluctantly, the truth has been reestablished. The primacy of the Eastern Front is recognized even by writers who in the thirties, forties, and fifties made their scholarly reputations by praising the activity of Stalin in the fateful Tsaritsyn sector.

It is not enough to say that for a year and a half the question of the existence of Soviet power was being decided in the East. The Eastern Front, besides that, was the furnace in which the RKKA was forged. The first regular units were created there; the qualities of leadership of many, if not most, of the leaders of the Red Army were first displayed there. Here is a list, far from complete, of commanders who gained their experience in the East: both Commanders-in-Chief during the Civil war, I. I. Vatsetis and S. S. Kamenev; Front Commander, and later People's Commissar for Navy and Chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council of the USSR, M.V. Frunze; Front Commanders M. N. Tukhachevskii, N. D. Kashirin, M. M. Lashevich, S. A. Mezheninov, I. P. Uborevich, R. P. Eideman; prominent political workers L. N. Aronshtam, A. S.

Bulin, I. M. Vareikis, V. V. Kuibyshev, I. N. Smirnov; commanders of lesser ranks who later occupied higher posts: I. P. Belov, M. D. Velikanov, N. V. Kuibyshev, K. K. Rokossovskii, V. D. Sokolovskii, V. I. Chuikov; legendary divisional commanders V. M. Azin, V. I. Chapaev; and many others.

The troops from the Eastern Front, who were thrown into the Southern and Western sectors after the defeat of Kolchak, turned the tide of the battle there also. The leaders of the Eastern Front played important roles in the victory in the civil war. Practically none of them survived the repression of 1937-1938.

The Eastern Front was opened in May 1918 as a result of the mutiny of the 50,000 men of the Czechoslovak Legion. Under the protection of the Czechoslovaks, White governments were established in the East with their center at Omsk. By August the Omsk government had at its disposal 40,000-50,000 troops. These units were only being formed and brought up to strength, however. The front was held by 40,000 Czechoslovaks. Another 12,000 Czechoslovaks had gone over to the Reds at the time of the mutiny. The Red Army under Vatsetis comprised 80,000-90,000 men. Moscow had by that time recognized its mistake underestimating the danger in the East. At first the Czech Legion dominated the whole Volga region. At Kazan the gold reserves of Russia fell into their hands. In the middle of August the Soviet forces went on the offensive and crushed the White Czechs. They took Kazan, Simbirsk, and Samara. The Czechs quit the fight and began their long retreat to the Far East. The Russian White Guards under General V. G. Boldyrev retreated into the Orenburg steppe.

It was clear to Boldyrev that his only salvations lay in a breakthrough toward Perm and Kotlas so he could link up with the government of Chaikovskii and Miller and the Anglo-American troops in the north. Only in that way could

the White Guards find the arms and other military supplies they needed. On December 25, the Whites seized Perm. By itself this event does not stand out among the many similar episodes of the civil war, but official historians have inflated its importance because the Central Committee sent a commission composed of Stalin and Dzerzhinskii to investigate its fall. The sonorous term "the Perm catastrophe" was invented to lend importance to Stalin's acts.

Reality was more prosaic. The 3rd Army defending Perm surrendered the city because they did not have enough men to hold it. The several army commanders who replaced one another there, M. M. Lashevich, P. I. Berzin, S. A. Mezheninov, repeatedly asked for reinforcements which they did not receive.

At that time the surrender of any city without the order of central authority was investigated by a special commission, and the guilty parties were given over to a military tribunal. After the surrender of Narva Dybenko was tried in this way; after the fall of Kharkov, Voroshilov. The commission investigating the surrender of Perm affirmed the conclusions of the 3rd Army command. No one was tried. The army sent reinforcements, and the enemy offensive was halted. That was basically all that happened. The appearance of Stalin on the Eastern Front is significant in that it was the only occasion in the history of the civil war in which he appeared in a theater of military operations without causing harm to the Red Army.

The major events of the Eastern Front occurred two months after Stalin's departure in the battle with Kolchak. Vice-Admiral Aleksandr Vasil'evich Kolchak, the former commander of the Black Sea Fleet, was one of the most able and educated officers of the Russian Navy. After graduating from the Naval Academy (Morskoi korpus) he served several years in the Navy, and then as a hydrologist and oceanographer he participated in several northern and

far-eastern expeditions sponsored by the Academy of Sciences. Kolchak was first-rate scientist. At one time he worked with F. Nansen.

After fleeing from Sevastopol and traveling most of the way around the world, Kolchak wound up in Omsk as Minister of War of the White government. On November 18, 1918 he carried out a coup and proclaimed himself Supreme Commander-in-Chief and Supreme Ruler of Russia. His army represented a serious threat, for a while a mortal danger, to the Soviets. The Red Army was still quite small, and recruitment was difficult. The policy of requisitioning grain from the peasants had caused a large part of the peasantry to reject Soviet authority. Many of them fled to areas held by Kolchak, but his government strove to resurrect the landlords' power, especially along the Volga. The peasants, who had seized the landlords' land, were punished with terrible cruelty. There were mass executions and whippings. Lenin, on the other hand, having assessed the extent of the danger, changed his tactics toward the peasants. The committees of poor peasants were disbanded, and the seizure of grain was temporarily halted, until spring. Because of that, Kolchak lost his major source of recruits, and the Red Army gained them.

At its largest, Kolchak's army had 150,000 cavalry and infantry, while the Red Army grew to almost 200,000 and continued to grow. In Siberia, in the Whites' rear, a peasant partisan movement also grew in numbers. The fate of Kolchak's army was decided.



## Chapter 6

### 1919-1921: The First Horse Army

The First Horse Army is sacrosanct in Soviet military history. As far as the average Soviet citizen knows, the First Horse is the Red Army of the time of the civil war, the unconquerable force that defended the workers-peasants' republic from the assaults of fourteen enemy powers, from Denikin, Kolchak, Iudenich, and Shkuro. On the Red side in the civil war there were seventeen field and two cavalry armies with a total enlistment of about five million men, but in popular memory only the 30,000-strong Horse Army has been preserved. Many books have been written about it, and songs have been composed in its honor. Its heroic battles have served as the theme for movies, plays, paintings, and monumental sculpture.

In the nineteen twenties and thirties, cavalrymen dominated the leadership of the armed forces of the country. In the 58 years from 1918 to 1976 the country has had, under various titles, ten ministers of war. The three of them who had served in the Horse Army guided the defense of the country for 25 years: 1925-1940, K. E. Voroshilov; 1940-1941, S. K. Timoshenko; 1967-1976, A. A. Grechko. In the nineteen-year interval from the end for the civil war to the beginning of the Fatherland War, there were only three years, and those the first three years, in which a cavalryman did not run the Red Army.

Service in the First Horse served as a pass to higher command responsibilities. The dictatorship of the cavalry, which is unique among the great powers of the twentieth century, was made possible by the dictatorship of the country by the patron of the First Horse, Stalin, and of the armed forces by his political mentor, Voroshilov. As Caligula had brought his horse into the Senate, these two horselovers packed the army's command with

cavalrymen. S. M. Budennyi, G. I. Kulik, E. A. Shchadenko, A. A. Grechko, K. S. Moskalenko were all Deputy Ministers, or Deputy People's Commissars, of Defense. K. A. Meretskov was chief of the General Staff. When individual ranks were reintroduced in 1935, two of the five first marshals were cavalrymen, and a third, Egorov, commanded the front on which the First Horse was created. It ought to be noted that neither of the two commanders-in-chief of the army during civil war became marshals, nor did Iakir or Uborevich. Altogether eight marshals of the Soviet Union, nine generals of the army and marshals of branches of the service, and a large number of other generals came from Budennyi's First Horse.

Before the Second World War Budennyi's men played an exceptional role in the Red Army. They are largely responsible for the catastrophe of 1937-38 and for the defeat in the first years of the war. Only when combat actually began was the unfitness of Voroshilov, Budennyi, Timoshenko, Shchadenko, Tiulenev, Apanasenko, and Kulik revealed. Kulik was twice demoted for shameful behavior at the front; having begun as a marshal he became a major. Stalin did not, however, permit one of his chief advisors from before the war to be professionally destroyed; Kulik died a major-general. In the mid-60s he was posthumously returned the marshal's baton. To be fair we ought also to note that several cavalrymen, who were little known before the war, showed themselves to be capable military leaders and achieved high rank on the field of combat: Eremenko, Rybalko, Katukov, and others.

All of this suggests we ought to look carefully at the First Horse Army. We do not intend to write its whole history, but will try to reestablish the truth about a few facts and incidents.

In Soviet literature it is considered unarguable that the First Horse Army was the first large unit (ob'edinenie) of strategic cavalry in the modern

history of war. The matter is not so simple. It is true that horse armies did not exist previously. However, the idea to form a strategic cavalry to carry out independent tasks separate from the main forces and deep in the rear of the enemy belongs to Anton Ivanovich Denikin. Not only did he introduce this bold idea, but in August 1919 he joined together two cavalry corps to form a larger unit. Later the cavalry corps under Shkuro was linked to this group, which was commanded by General Mamontov. This gave Denikin a strategic cavalry group equal in size to an army. Mamontov's group broke through the Red Army's Southern Front and for a month successfully operated in its rear, taking Tambov, Kozlov, and Voronezh. The Soviet counter-offensive was broken. Mamontov's successes permitted General Mai-Maevskii to take his army far to the north, where they took Kursk and Orlov, directly threatened Tula with its arms factories and Moscow itself.

In the third volume of the History of the Civil War we read:

The importance of massed cavalry in the conditions of the civil war were correctly learned by the Red commanders from the example of Mamontov's raid. That raid made up their minds about the creation of massed cavalry in the Red Army. . .<sup>1</sup>

This testimony about the priority of Denikin is all the more valuable because it comes from the highest leadership of the Red Army of that period. The editors of that volume were S. S. Kamenev, Bubnov, Tukhachevskii, and Eideman. Later Soviet historians tried to forget that admission.

The second and extremely complex question is where did the First Army come from? For a long while we have been told that it arose from the cavalry corps of Budennyi, which in turn had grown out of his 4th cavalry division. In the 60s the screen of lies was temporarily lifted by the efforts of several honest

historians, including T. A. Illeritskaia and V. D. Polikarpov. This called forth an extraordinarily sharp reaction from the Budennyi camp, and further research was halted.

What caused the stormy anger of these aging but influential men? The commandant of the Frunze Military Academy, Army General A. T. Stuchenko, for example, turned up in his cavalry sword at the editorial office of Nedelia, the journal that printed Polikarpov's article. They were disturbed, even insulted, by the attempt to reestablish the true circumstances of the demise of one of the participants of the civil war, B. M. Dumenko. From the facts of his biography, which are presented below, it will become clear that the veterans were upset unnecessarily.

Don Cossack Boris Mokeevich Dumenko formed a cavalry detachment of the insurgents of Sal'skii and other districts in 1918. In July the detachment grew to become the First Peasants' Socialist Punitive Cavalry Regiment. Dumenko commanded the regiment and Budennyi soon became his assistant. Under Dumenko's leadership the regiment developed first into a cavalry brigade, then into a division, that same 4th Petrograd Cavalry Division from which, the Budennyi men say, the First Horse was taken. Dumenko commanded the division until May 1919 and was in that time awarded an Order of the Red Banner. Then in connection with the organization of larger cavalry formations he was appointed head of the cavalry of the 10th Army. He had under him there the 4th Cavalry Division, commanded by Budennyi, and the 6th Cavalry Division under I. P. Apanasenko. Not long after that Dumenko was seriously wounded and put out of action until the fall. While he was recuperating, the First Horse Corps was formed from the 4th and 6th Divisions. Upon his return to duty Dumenko was made commander of the Combined Horse Corps, which was just then being formed. In January of 1920 Dumenko's corps defeated Denikin's cavalry

at Novocherkassk, making it easier for the First Horse and the 8th Army to take Rostov.

In February two of Budennyi men visited Dumenko - Divisional Commander S. K. Timoshenko, who was temporarily suspended for drunkenness, and B. S. Gorbachev, commander of the Special Cavalry Brigade (the horse army's). They came to arrest Dumenko, but as they would not be able to do that in the presence of his men, they had to devise another plan. They persuaded Dumenko to have a drink. Since he had had part of his stomach surgically removed, he quickly became drunk. The plan worked. Timoshenko went under the table first, but the host soon followed him. Gorbachev rolled Dumenko in a carpet and dragged him to his cart, then he lugged out the future marshal and people's commissar.

They delivered Dumenko to the headquarters of the First Horse, and from there they took him along with three of his subordinates to Rostov where they were tried by a tribunal. They were accused of organizing the murder of Mikeladze, a commissar of the Combined Horse Corps, who had died under mysterious circumstances. The tribunal had no evidence; nonetheless Dumenko and his comrades were shot. Forty some years later the Deputy General Procurator of the USSR Blinov studied the materials of the case and had to ask, "If this is law, what then is scandalous illegality?"

Dumenko's name was erased from the history of the Red Army. Budennyi attributed to himself Dumenko's honors. In 1920 Dumenko represented a serious threat to Budennyi's pretense to be the Red Army's leading cavalryman. There is reason to believe that Budennyi together with Voroshilov planned his removal. Not only the circumstances of Dumenko's arrest support this supposition, but also the presence on the tribunal of E. A. Shchadenko, a First Horse man, the later and long-lasting malevolence toward Dumenko, and

Budennyi's behavior toward another of his rivals, F. K. Mironov, about which we will have more to say. It is worth noting also, that the command of the First Horse frequently raised the question of subordinating Dumenko's corps to themselves.

After Uborevich's group defeated the Volunteer Army at Orel, Budennyi's unit became the trump card in the hand of the Red command. In October 1919 his horse corps, reinforced by a cavalry division and an infantry brigade, dealt the fatal blow to the Whites' strategic cavalry in the Voronezh-Kastonaia operation. Budennyi already had a horse army under his command in reality. It was formally organized in November. The result was seen not only in the defeat on Mamontov's group, which never recovered, but also in the colossal boost it gave to Red Army morale. From then on Denikin's rear remained constantly in danger.

The White Front broke all along its length, and the Soviet Command hastened to pursue its strategic advantage. In January 1920 the First Horse with a lightning-quick strike took Rostov. The 8th Army secured the Cavalry's success. As Denikin's troops retreated, they formed a line of defense on the left bank of the Don with a key position at Bataisk. The Reds' strategy, which was devised by the command of the Caucasus Front under V. I. Shorin, and in which the First Horse participated, was to surround or seize Bataisk to prevent the main White force from reaching Novorossiisk. In that way they would deprive Denikin of the possibility of crossing over to the Crimea where he could organize a new front.

History has shown that Shorin properly appraised the situation. Denikin had planned to retreat to the Crimea through Novorossiisk if he were unable to hold his position on the Don. But the Reds failed to break through the White front right away. The First Horse and the 8th Army tried several times to

take Bataisk, but they failed. The delay in the Red Army's offensive did eventually prove costly. Denikin took advantage of it and crossed over to the Crimea with 40,000 men.

The "Bataisk Bottleneck" gave rise to very bitter arguments in the Red camp. Shorin accused Budennyi and the commander of the 8th Army, G. Ia. Sokol'nikov, of failing to take decisive action. Budennyi complained about "the terrain which is entirely unsuitable for cavalry." Sokol'nikov reproved the Horse Army for its display of "extraordinary little combat hardiness". Without going into the essence of the argument, let us note that it was at Bataisk that the inability of strategic cavalry to overcome solidly prepared defenses was first discovered. Undoubtedly the unfavorable conditions of the terrain also played a role: the water barrier of the Don and the swampiness of the left bank hampered the cavalry. But we cannot exclude the psychological factor. It was extremely difficult for Voroshilov and Budennyi to drag their horsemen from the warmth and comfort of Rostov in the middle of winter.

In the spring of 1920 the First Horse was transferred in march formation from the Caucasus to the Polish front. On May 18 they arrived at Elizavetgrad. At that time the Poles had just taken Kiev and were going on the defensive all along the front. Putting the Horse Army into action turned things in the Soviets' favor. On June 5 they broke through the enemy front at the village of Uzernaia and with all four divisions advanced into the Polish rear. It was a huge operational success and the culmination of the First Horse's fighting. It posed the threat of complete encirclement and destruction to the 3rd Polish Army of General Rydz-Smigla. But operation "Kiev's Cannae" was not to be carried out.<sup>2</sup> Iakir and Golikov's groups were slow to complete their assignments, and the First Horse in violation of its

orders did not strike into Rydz-Smigla's rear. Instead they bypassed fortified Kazatin and seized Berdichev and Zhitomir with their rich warehouses. The success of the South-west front was incomplete. The Poles lost all of the territory they had seized in the Ukraine, but they managed to escape as an army.

During the Soviet offensive Commander-in-Chief S. S. Kamenev devised a plan for the further conduct of the campaign, which received the approval of the Politbiuro. It was projected that once all the Red forces had reached the Brest-Southern Bug line, the administration of the Southwest Front (Commander Egorov, and Revolutionary Military Council members Stalin and Berzin) would turn over to Tukhachevskii, as Commander of the Western Front, the First Horse and the 12th and 14th Armies, and themselves proceed against Vrangeli, who was then advancing into Northern Tavris. Stalin was not at all pleased with the prospect of not participating in the forthcoming seizure of Poland. Tukhachevskii later wrote that "the existence of the capitalist world, not just of Poland, but of all Europe was wagered on that card."<sup>3</sup> Stalin, the fiery revolutionary, wanted to attack world capitalism personally.

By the middle of July 1920, Tukhachevskii's troops had overrun the opposing front of General Szeptitski, had occupied Bobruisk, Minsk, and Vil'no, and had burst into Polish territory. The Poles' situation became desperate. Warsaw was in danger and with it the young Polish state. Western diplomacy rushed to help Pilsudski. On July 12, Curzon issued an ultimatum. The English minister of foreign affairs demanded that military activity cease and that a so-called ethnographic boundary be established between Poland and Soviet Russia, approximately where the border now is. The ultimatum was rejected, but after a direct appeal by the Poles, negotiations were begun at Borisov. Meanwhile, the Red offensive continued on both fronts.



At the beginning of August the Commander-in-Chief reached the decision about a concentric strike with all forces against Warsaw. In connection with this he gave the order to transfer to the command of the Western Front (to Tukhachevskii) the 12th and First Horse Armies at first, and later also the 14th. Jozef Pilsudski, the Polish leader considered his situation at that moment to be catastrophic. He believed that Polish forces would not be able to hold back an attack from the east and south and asked the commandant of L'vov fortified region to draw upon himself at least three Red divisions.

Suddenly Pilsudski was given reason to hope. The command of the Southwest Front stormed L'vov with the very armies which were meant to be sent against Warsaw. The Red's original plan was destroyed, and the enemy received an unexpected chance to organize a counter offensive. Part of the blame has to be laid to Commander-in-Chief Kamenev, who was insufficiently firm in implementing his own directives, and who at the last moment became frightened of an imaginary Rumanian threat. But the greater responsibility must rest with Stalin, who so badly wanted the sensational success of taking L'vov. Spineless Egorov could not stand up to the insistence of the future Great leader. L'vov was well fortified, however, and the First Horse and the 12th Armies were not up to taking it. Lenin categorically protested against striking "with five fingers spread wide" and insisted upon taking Warsaw. Stalin stood by his guns. For ten days a fruitless exchange of telegrams went on. Finally under pressure from Lenin the Commander-in-Chief categorically demanded on August 13 that his directive to transfer the three armies to Tukhachevskii be carried out. Stalin remained true to himself and did not sign the order prepared by Egorov. It should be remembered that in those years an order by a commander did not have legal force unless it was also signed by one of the members of the Revolutionary Council. Up to then Stalin

as the senior member of the Revolutionary Military Council had signed all of the operational orders of the commander. Another of the political commissars of the front, P. I. Berzin, tried to stay out of purely military matters and signed the order only after a direct order from Trotskii.

Stalin's willfulness interrupted his military career for twenty years. He was about to send a telegram of resignation to Moscow, calculating that his plan of action would be accepted. However, the plenum of the Central Committee that was then meeting removed Stalin from the front and from all other military work as well. He was not re-elected to the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic.

It was only after this exchange of telegrams that the First Horse was transferred and assigned to the Warsaw offensive. But time had been wasted, and the situation had drastically changed. The Poles took advantage of the breathing space and went over to the counteroffensive. The Polish command directed a strike between the Soviet fronts at the weak Mozyrsk group and further disrupted the campaign. Now the Poles' slight numerical superiority and better equipment complemented a solid operational advantage. The war had also roused the Polish people's national and patriotic feeling. The hope of the Bolsheviks and their Polish colleagues (Dzerzhinskii, Markhlevskii, Unshlikht) that the Polish proletariat would support the Bolsheviks turned out to be a chimera.<sup>4</sup>

The troops of the Red Army retreated on both fronts, yielding to the Poles the western parts of the Ukraine and Belorussia. The First Horse drew back to Zamost'e, barely escaping destruction. The Peace of Riga in March 1921 established the border much further east than the "Curzon line".

Tukhachevskii, whom Stalin's self-seeking actions had deprived of the chance to successfully complete the operation, never did try to identify those

responsible for the defeat.<sup>5</sup> Stalin and his minions were not so delicate. Even before his arrest, they accused Tukhachevskii of mistakes on the Polish front. After the marshal's death all of the textbooks and military works carried the standard formula: the traitors Trotskii and Tukhachevskii prevented the capture of L'vov and Warsaw.

The lessons of the Polish campaign permit a sober assessment of the strengths and weakness of the First Horse Army and also of the conception of a strategic cavalry in general. Massed cavalry were effective in breakthroughs, on raids into the enemy's rear, and in forays. The civil war differed from the just-concluded world war in that the front lines were not continuous and the fire not as dense. Each of the extremely long fronts had only 135 to 185 riflemen for each verst (.67 mile), less than the corresponding ratio for outposts in the world war and less than enough to prevent a breakthrough. Because of the absence of echeloned defences, incursions into the rear of the enemy were often made unopposed, and assaults on troop concentrations were frequently carried out with complete surprise. When the cavalry tried to overrun prepared defences, however, it lost its advantages. It suffered large losses and often failed. It was that way at Bataisk and at L'vov, where repeated assaults were repulsed. The cavalry was also badly suited to conduct defensive battles. In them it needed the close support of the infantry, but the strength of the cavalry lay in its ability to carry out assignments independently of an army's main forces. There arose a contradiction which was seemingly insoluble. Massed cavalry were needed only for a short period of the civil war, and were useful only in certain specific conditions. Voroshilov, Budennyi, and Egorov found, however, that armed with the dialectic, Marxist military thought could solve the dilemma.

They declared that all future wars would be exclusively mobile, and since the Red Army would only attack, it could not do without a powerful cavalry.

In all types of combat actions the First Horse was very vulnerable from the air. Aerial attacks cost it heavy losses at L'vov and later against Vrangeli'. Voroshilov complained to Frunze in November 1920, "We have nothing to counter aerial bombing by groups of airplanes against massed cavalry."<sup>6</sup>

Before that, however, on its way to the front against Vrangeli', the Horse Army had to pass through its very worst experience. Having just tasted the bitterness of defeat, the rather battered First Horse began to come apart. The ill-assorted troops of Budennyi's army never did sin on the side of excessive discipline. The Revolutionary Military Council of the First Horse only with difficulty reigned in the free-spirited horsemen. Also because of the necessity of provisioning themselves, the Army often came into sharp conflict with the civilian population. The Army command had had to justify their conduct on this score to higher authorities, on several occasions all the way up to Lenin and Trotskii. Voroshilov turned A. Ia. Parkhomenko, the commandant of the city of Rostov, over to a tribunal for having organized a pogrom against the Jewish population. He was sentenced to death, and only the intervention of Stalin and Ordzhonikidze saved the life of this legendary divisional commander.

What happened when the First Horse was transferred from the Polish Front was even more serious. The cavalrymen's morals, which were honestly described by Babel, horrified many of his readers. But Babel did not see the Horse Army on its way to the Crimea, when, according to Voroshilov, it lived through its "darkest days". The troops pillaged the civilians. Shepelev, commissar of the 6th Cavalry Division, was killed trying to stop them. Voroshilov had to act decisively. According to his biographer, Orlovskii, himself a former

secretary of the Horse Army's Military Revolutionary Council, Voroshilov believed that such an outburst of "partisan behavior" could destroy the army.<sup>7</sup> He put a whole division on trial, an event unprecedented in the Red Army, and had it disbanded. Under the muzzle of the "special forces" the troops surrendered their colors and arms and began to name the pillagers. One hundred and fifty of them were taken, and 101 were shot. With their blood the men of the division were given the chance to wash away their shame.

The First Horse traveled slowly to the front against Vrangeli' and arrived there seriously weakened. Moreover, Voroshilov and Budennyi did not want to fight in the Crimea except according to their own plans. Because they had gained special status, Frunze sent them into action only when victory was no longer in doubt.

The last major outbreak of "the partisan movement" occurred in 1921 in the Northern Caucasus. Because of opposition to the grain requisitioning, a brigade led by Maslakov broke off from the First Horse and became an anti-Soviet partisan detachment. Self-provisioning continued, with its unavoidable theft. Tribunals followed and did their work. A substantial part of the Horse Army's troops were executed. The Army itself was soon disbanded.



## Chapter 7

### Mironov

The battle for the Crimea, which developed in the fall of 1920, was full of tension and drama. The confrontation of Vrangeli' and Frunze's forces ended in the complete victory of the latter. However, the history of the Crimean-Tavridian operation has for a long time been misrepresented. Most attention has been paid to those personalities who are supposed to have played the leading roles in the civil war. It is easy to guess that we are speaking of the First Horse Army, whose participation in that operation was minor and not particularly successful.<sup>1</sup>

The facts of the matter were considerably enlightened by the appearance of V. V. Dushenkin's book, The Second Horse.<sup>2</sup> It was impossible, however, to tell the whole truth about the fate of army commander Mironov in a censored publication. S. Starikov and R. Medvedev did that in their substantial - 320 typed pages - historical essay "The Life and Death of Filipp Kuz'mich Mironov: Soviet authority and the Don Cossacks 1917-1921." From that unpublished work, which contains numerous genuine documents of the time, we have taken the main facts for a brief biography of Mironov.<sup>3</sup>

Filipp Mironov was born into a poor Cossack family in 1872. He completed the local parish school and two years of high school in his native Ust'-Medveditskii region (okrug). He completed high school without attending further classes, by examination. Mironov received his military education at a Cossack cadet school and at age 30 held the rank of cornet. In the Russo-Japanese War he earned four decorations and a promotion (to podesaul). In 1906 at the height of the revolution, he spoke at his Cossack village meeting against the mobilization of the Cossacks for internal, that is, police

duty. Because of that soon after he returned to his regiment he was deprived of his officer status. Mironov returned to his native village and farmed. From 1910 to 1912 he served as head of the land department of the Don Territory (oblast') administration, where he worked out a project for the equalization of land allotments for Cossacks of the upper and lower villages and also for the allotting of land to non-Cossacks.

At the beginning of the world war Mironov volunteered and went to the front. He was made an officer again and fought bravely for which he was awarded (St. George's Arms), four decorations, and two promotions to esaul and troop elder (the Cossack equivalent of lieutenant-colonel).

Mironov was a Cossack intelligent, a rebel, and a defender of the people's rights. He put the ideals of freedom ahead of any party programs. The revolution gave great scope to his social temperament. Later, when he was on trial, the defender was quite right to call him "the lion of the revolution".

In April 1917, after a run-in with his regimental commander, Mironov took leave and left for the Don. In his native village he organized a local group of people's socialist-workers. During the Kornilov revolt he spoke openly against Kaledin and made an unsuccessful attempt to arrest him.

In October Mironov returned to the front to his regiment. He greeted the Bolshevik revolution, in his word, "unsympathetically". His political platform was "a democratic republic on a federative basis, the right of popular referendum, the right of popular initiative, etc." However Mironov actively and successfully resisted the use of Cossack units to put down the Bolsheviks. He took the 32nd regiment under his command and led it to the Don, where he arrived in January 1918.

By that time Mironov's sympathies were with the Bolsheviks. He was not, however, a thorough Bolshevik himself, and he never did become one. He



immediately opposed the revolutionary committee of Mikhailovka village which was shooting officers by the bunch just because they were officers. He succeeded in having the committee re-elected, then he disbanded his regiment and went to Ust'-Medveditskii to establish Soviet authority. Mironov became military commissar of the region and a member of the executive committee.

Kaledin committed suicide. By March 1918 the Soviets had taken over almost the whole Don, but they did not keep it long. General Krasnov organized a White Cossack army and invited the Germans to the Don. Detachments of officers made their way there. The Don Soviet Republic ceased to be, its Council of People's Commissars moved to Tsaritsyn. They held out longer in the north, in Ust'-Medveditskii and Khoperskii regions, where Mironov commanded the troops. He had very small forces, but he fought successfully. His popularity grew on both sides of the front. Krasnov is supposed to have said, "I have a lot of officers, but I don't have a single Mironov."

Mironov worked miracles to hold off the White Cossack armies storming Tsaritsyn. That, however, did not increase the political commissars' trust of him. Stalin wrote Lenin on 4 August:

. . . Cossack units that call themselves Soviet cannot not want to fight the Cossack counter-revolution; Cossacks have gone over to Mironov's side in whole regiments to get weapons, to learn the disposition of our troops on the spot and then lead away whole regiments to Krasnov's side; Mironov has been surrounded three times by Cossacks who knew everything about his sector and, naturally, destroyed him utterly.

Stalin, of course, did not pay particular attention to the facts and invented the threefold destruction of Mironov to justify the generally bad situation around Tsaritsyn, which was caused by Stalin and Voroshilov's glaring stupidities and their destruction of the specialists. It was Stalin who, having killed the honest officers in the RKKA's ranks, overlooked the real traitor Nosovich, and who, when Nosovich defected to the Whites, appointed Denikin's agent, Kovalevskii, military instructor. There was no need for Mironov to carry out Nosovich's treacherous orders. Moscow tended to believe a TsK member rather than the Cossack lieutenant colonel, and Mironov did not receive the reinforcements he requested.

Mironov hung on despite all odds. Instead of reinforcements they gave him a decoration. His brigade continued to grow as deserters continued to leave Krasnov and soon became a division, at first the 1st Ust'-Medveditskii, later the 23rd. Mironov tried to maintain the honor of the revolutionary army. He struggled against pillaging, anti-Semitic agitation and pogroms. He did not shoot his prisoners, but permitted them to return to their homes.

During the Red offensive in early 1919 Mironov commanded a group of troops of the 9th Army. Once they had taken the northern part of Don territory from Krasnov, the Bolsheviks no longer fooled around with elected Soviets. Revolutionary committees were set up everywhere with power over the life, death and property of the local inhabitants. It broke Mironov's heart to see how people were becoming heads of local revolutionary committees who "should not be permitted to run regional affairs because of the way they had behaved when the revolution was in danger. Now, when the revolution was strong, all of the slugs were crawling out on the sun and dirtying it."

Mironov protested energetically, but his quixotic outbursts were as useless as he knew they would be. Everyone knew that the commissars he

complained of were good for nothing. Still they were left in place. Such things were going on at the Don that everyone needed his own men in place, however bad they might be. There was no room for Mironov. The first to ask for his removal was Chairman of the Donbiuro S. Syrtsov, later head of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Southern Front: "remove Mironov from his native villages, if necessary by promoting him." Trotskii ordered Mironov to come to the commander-in-chief's HQ in Serpukhov. Despite all the efforts of Sokol'nikov, who was a member of the RVS of the Southern Front and the TsK, and of Kniagnitskii, commander of the 9th army, Mironov had to leave his units at the height of the offensive. On the surface Mironov's recall looked entirely regular. The RVSR awarded Mironov a gold watch and chain, and the 23rd division was given the Red Banner.

If one thinks about it, the recall was a good, humanitarian act. Because it was just then in early 1919 that at the Don and in other Cossack regions the Bolsheviks began something that Mironov, who was extremely sensitive to injustice, arbitrariness and violence, could not have stood - de-Cossackization.

Mironov, a Cossack who was still not a party member, knew nothing about this. During his enforced idleness at HQ he sent a report to the RVSR, which read in part:

So that the Cossack population remains sympathetic to the Soviet authorities, it is necessary:

1. To be concerned with the historical, traditional and religious facets of their life. Time and capable political workers will dispel the darkness and the fanaticism of the Cossacks, inculcated by centuries of barracks upbringing . . .

2. During the revolutionary period of the struggle with the bourgeoisie, until the counter-revolution is suppressed on the Don, circumstances require that the idea of communism be transmitted to the minds of the Cossack and peasant populations by means of lectures, conversations, brochures, etc, but in no circumstances forced upon them violently, as seems to be the case now in the acts of the "casual communists".

3. At the moment it is not necessary to make an inventory of live-stock and dead-stock. It would be better to announce firm prices and demand delivery of products from the population . . . in the course of which it is necessary to take their prosperity into account . . .

Of course, the capable political workers, just like the casual communists, took guidance from a circular (and secret) letter of the TsK RKP(b) of 29 January 1919. Here is that startling document.

It is necessary, considering the experience of the civil war with the Cossacks, to recognize that the only proper approach is a merciless struggle against the whole Cossack leadership to destroy them to the last man.

1. Carry out mass terror (emphasis in the original) against wealthy Cossacks, and having killed them all conduct merciless mass terror against all Cossacks who take any part, direct or indirect, in the struggle with Soviet power. Take all measures against the middle Cossacks to guarantee there will be no efforts on their part to mount new demonstrations against Soviet power.

What sort of measures they had in mind is best explained by I. Iakir, a member of the RVS of the 8th Army, which was then operating at the Don:

There will be rebellions in the rear of our troops in the future unless measures are taken to nip in the bud even the thought of such rebellions. These measures: the complete annihilation of all who rebel, execution on the spot of all who possess weapons, and even the execution of a certain percentage of the male population. There must be no negotiations with rebels.

Thus, the complete annihilation of a) the rich, b) those who take any part in rebellions, c) those who possess weapons. It is interesting to ask, what Cossack did not have a weapon? A percentage of the rest, who happened not to fall into any of those categories, were to be killed to teach the others not even to think of rebellion and that sort of thing. And who would live on this land purified by revolutionary justice? The answer is contained in that same letter of the TsK to which we now return:

2. Confiscate grain (since it is not said from whom, it implies from all) and require that all surplus (an obvious logical redundancy, for what can be surplus after confiscation) be brought to specified places. This refers to grain as well as to all other agricultural products.

3. Take all measures to assist poor, newly arrived settlers; organize resettlement where that is possible.

4. Equalize newly arrived non-Cossacks with the Cossacks in land holding and in all other relations (except apparently in mass executions).

5. Carry out full disarmament. Shoot everyone who possesses a weapon after the deadline for turning them in.

6. Distribute arms only to reliable elements among the non-Cossacks.

7. Maintain armed detachments in Cossack villages until complete order is established.

8. All commissars who are assigned to Cossack settlements are expected to be absolutely firm and to carry out these orders unswervingly.

The Central Committee decrees that the obligation be passed to the People's Commissariat of Agriculture through the appropriate Soviet organs to work out as soon as possible the actual means for a massive resettlement of poor peasants to Cossacks lands. TsK RKP(b).

The Cossacks are a nationality, close to the Russians in language and religion, but with a wholly different way of life which was formed by centuries of their history.<sup>4</sup> The TsK directive was a firm plan for genocide to be carried out in all eleven Cossack territories. It called also for organized colonization of the land thus freed by another ethnic group, chosen on the basis of property. This policy was applied all through the first half of 1919 and had particularly noticeable results in the Don and Ural River territories.

Proscriptions reached the scale of a natural disaster. Exact totals have not been made, but the toll reached the tens of thousands. Reliable non-Cossacks under the leadership of the commissars cut the Cossacks down right and left, brandishing as they did so the red banner. The thin shell of class struggle immediately fell to pieces, laying bare its zoological

essence. They killed the wealthy and the middling; nor did they spare the malcontents who let slip a harsh word. They just settled their accounts. If the Cossacks were not at home, they led out the wives, even their daughters, to be shot.

Of course, not all of the executions were illegal. The Cheka and army tribunals were hard at work. From the time of their arrival at the Don they were organized in every regiment. An order of the RVS of the Southern Front said, "Witnesses may be questioned if the tribunal finds it necessary." The tribunals hardly ever availed themselves of that right, preferring to judge by lists. Usually the trial and sentencing (need it be said that that was death by shooting) took only a few minutes. The 8th Army alone officially signed eight thousand people over to the hereafter. Other armies did not lag far behind, particularly the 10th. Wordly-wise Cossacks had to admit that the Bolsheviks were "pretty severe".

All of this monstrous cruelty could not have remained unanswered. On the night of 11-12 March a rebellion broke out in Kazanskaia and Veshenskaia stanitsas. A description of that can be found in the novel "Quite Flows the Don".<sup>5</sup> However, the picture given there is incomplete. Sholokhov, using Kriukov's manuscript, toned things down. He admitted that himself in a letter to Gorky, saying:

. . . I left out on purpose certain facts about the direct cause of the rebellion, such as the senseless shooting of 62 Cossack old men in Migulinskaia or the shootings in Kazanskaia and Shumilinskaia, where the number of Cossack victims exceeded 400 in the course of six days.

From the novel one might think the revolutionary committees committed several abusive acts which cost the lives of a few dozen people. Because of that the

sixth part of "Quiet Flows the Don" was withheld from the printers for a long time.

When their facile circular letter resulted in a desperate rebellion, which moreover had broken out dangerously close to Denikin, Moscow had to stop and think again. On 16 March in response to Sokol'nikov's report the TsK decided to halt the effort to destroy the Cossacks. That same day Ia. Sverdlov, who had been seriously ill and who had not attended the meeting, died. Because of that coincidence several historians have tried to place the blame on him alone. They claim that the directive of 29 January had been promulgated by the Orgbiuro, which was headed by Sverdlov, without the knowledge of the TsK of Lenin. The only evidence for this is that Sverdlov signed the covering letter sent with the circular letter. How is it possible to explain away, however, the fact that in carrying out the final part of the directive the Council of People's Commissars issued a directive in April (!) concerning the resettling of poor peasants on Cossack lands.

The people on the spot were reluctant to stop the genocide. The Donbiuro continued the former policy until June despite the protests of various Party workers.<sup>6</sup> The Southern Front revoked its orders about terror only at the end of April. The de-Cossackization was actually stopped by Denikin's offensive, which by the end of June had occupied all the Don territory and had seized Tsaritsyn.

We left Mironov at the moment that Trotskii's orders took him from the front. He did not find the People's Commissar of Army and Navy at Serpukhov HQ and had to go on to Moscow. It immediately became clear in his conversation with Trotskii, that Trotskii did not have any definite plans for using Mironov. They agreed that Mironov would form a Cossack cavalry division of six regiments, which was confirmed by an order of the RVSR on 15 March.



Mironov went to Kozlov where the Southern Front command was located. There he was to receive 15 million rubles mainly to purchase horses.

The behind-the-scenes maneuvering started up again. The commissars of the Donbiuro and the Southern Front were dead set against allowing Mironov to return, because he might serve as a rallying point for shattered Cossackdom. They drummed into Trotskii that Mironov was a threat to the Donbiuro, Soviet authority and Trotskii himself. At Kozlov they refused to give him the money and forbade him to leave for the Don. They sent him to Serpukhov and put him at the service of Commander-in-Chief Vatsetis. Mironov was posted to Smolensk as assistant commander of the Belorussian-Lithuanian Army. He soon became commander, but still he felt as if he were in exile. Vague rumors of what was happening on the Don reached him, but of course he could not know what was really going on.

Meanwhile the bloody chaos in the Don territory was laying the way for the defeat of the Red forces. The rebels defeated Khvesin's expeditionary (punitive) corps, which was sent to pacify the Don. Three of Denikin's regiments broke through the front from the south and pushed as far as Kazanskaia. The northern Don territories were now threatened by the uprising.

And now was the time for Mironov to make his reappearance. At Sokol'nikov's suggestion the RVSR appointed Mironov commander of the expeditionary corps, which was renamed a Special Corps. Mironov hurried to the Don, where in the northern regions, which were now in extreme danger, an emergency mobilization was in progress. Mironov agitated passionately at meetings urging the Cossacks to attack Denikin. His enormous personal authority got the job done.

Together with the newly appointed commissar V. Trifonov, Mironov rode to take over the corps from Khvesin. The corps presented a sad spectacle. Whole

Cossack squadrons had gone over to the enemy. Only 80 men were left to a regiment, 120 in the brigades. He would have to start from scratch and so informed the Southern Front command.

By this time Mironov knew the truth of de-Cossackization and the Veshenskaia uprising. Through all the turmoil of forming new units he was tormented by doubts. He cast about desperately for some way out of this bloody nightmare. He understood that he could not make common cause with Denikin and that the Reds in the name of their sociological schemes were prepared to tear Cossackdom out by the roots. Mironov poured all of his troubled soul into an extremely long telegram which he addressed to Trotskii, Lenin, and Kalinin and sent from Anna Station on 24 June. One cannot read that document without emotion.

. . . I stood and I stand not for the cellular organization of national life along a narrow Party program, but for a public structure in which the people take an active part. I do not have the bourgeoisie and kulaks in mind here. Only this sort of structure will gain the sympathies of the peasant masses and parts of the honest intelligentsia.

Further on he described the condition of the corps:

. . . the special corps has about three thousand men to cover 145 versts of front. The units are strained and exhausted. Except for three classes all the cadets have proven to be beneath criticism and those pitiful tens and hundreds are all that are left of many thousands. The communist regiment has fled. There were men in it who did not know how to load a rifle. The special corps might serve as a screen. The situation of the special corps is

saved now only by the fact that Cossacks mobilized from Khoperskii region have been brought in. General Denikin's reliance on that region was not wholly justified. As soon as the White guards have corrected that deficiency, the special corps, as a screen, will be broken.

Without equivocation or evasions Mironov named the causes of the impending catastrophe:

It is not only on the Don that the actions of some revolutionary committees, special detachments, tribunals, and some commissars (Mironov wrote some only because he did not know of the TsK directive) have caused a massive uprising. That uprising threatens to spill over in a broad wave through peasant villages across the face of the whole republic. To say that voices called out openly in village meetings at Novaia Chigla, Verkho-Tishanka, and elsewhere, "Give us the tsar," sheds light on the mood of the peasant masses, which has resulted in such a high percentage of deserters and has created detachments of Greens. The uprising in Ilovatka on the Tersa River is contained for the time being, but serious unrest in most of the uezds of Saratov guberniia threatens to destroy the cause of socialist revolution. I am not a Party man, but I have spent too much of my strength and health in the struggle for socialist revolution, to watch unconcerned while General Denikin on his horse "Komuniia" tramples the red banner of labor.

Having analyzed the situation and come to the point, Mironov made his recommendations. The first concerned the Special Corps:

Looking thoughtfully into the future and seeing the death of the social revolution, for nothing disposes me to optimism and I am rarely a mistaken pessimist, I consider it necessary to recommend the following measures urgently: first, strengthen the special corps with fresh divisions; second, transfer to it the 23rd division as the foundation for a future powerful new army, with which I and division commander Golikov will personally seize the initiative to set an example for other divisions and armies; or (third) appoint me commander of the 9th Army, where my combat authority stands high . . .

Then came his political program:

. . . fourth, the political condition of the country urgently requires the calling of a popular representative body, and not just of one party, so as to cut the ground out from under the traitorous socialists, while continuing the struggle on the front and establishing the power of the Red Army.

This step will recapture the sympathy of the people, who will gladly take up arms to save their land and freedom. This representative body need not be called a zemskii sobor or a constituent assembly, but it must be convened. The people are groaning. I have sent many reports to the Southern Front revvoensovet among them this: a peasant of the 34th department, now renamed Lenin Region. A family of

21 with four pairs of oxen. Their own commune. For refusal to enter a commune a commissar seized their oxen, and when the peasant protested, they killed him. I also transmitted a report from chairman Ermak of one of the tribunals, whose words were terrible to read. I repeat, the people are ready to fling themselves into the embrace of the landlord cabal; in hopes that their suffering will not be so painful, so obvious as it is now.

His last suggestion concerned the holy of holies, the Bolshevik Party:

Fifth, the purge of the Party must be carried out on the following principle. All communists (who joined the Party) after the October Revolution must be formed into companies and sent to the front. You will then see who are the real communists, who are the self-seekers, who are provocateurs, and who have been polluting all the revolutionary committees and special detachments. The Morozovskii revolutionary committee, which killed 67 people and then was itself shot, is a good example.

Original signed by Special Corps Commander Citizen Mironov

After so many years it makes no sense to judge which of Mironov's suggestions were realistic and to what degree. This was a cri de coeur of an honest and ardent warrior of the revolution. His telegram was not answered.

Denikin continued to advance. The Reds lost the Don, Donbass, and Tsaritsyn. The Special Corps was no longer useful as either a punitive unit or as a screen. Mironov advanced the idea to create a Cossack Corps from men already mobilized and those who had fled from the Don region in order to attack Denikin's cavalry. This time the capital was not deaf. The corps

commander was called to Moscow. On 7 July he appeared in the Cossack department of the VTsIK and was made part of its staff. The next day together with the commissar of the department, Makarov, he visited Lenin. Lenin supported the creation of a corps of Cossacks, and after Mironov had left he said to Makarov, "We need such men. We must use them well." They did indeed use men like Mironov - as long as they needed them.

With the authorities' blessing Mironov set off for Saransk to form his corps. But once again all expectations, promises and hopes proved chimerical. They gave him nothing - no horses, no men, no ammunition, not even decent political workers. The so-called "Khopersk communists" had ensconced themselves in the RVS and the political department - Larin, Boldyrev, Rogachev, Zaitsev, who were splattered from head to foot with Cossack blood, felt no remorse for their victims, only fierce hatred. The Cossack department of the VTsIK warned that they "must not be allowed in the Don territory, because they have left there an awful memory . . . in general they must not be trusted in any case . . . " This was disregarded. The commissar of the Special Corps, V. Trifonov, refused to work with Mironov after it was decided to organize a Cossack corps. The old Party-man felt at home in a punitive unit, but he considered Cossack units foolhardy.

The "Khopersk communists" waged a deadly campaign against the commander. Slandorous reports flew to Moscow demanding that the corps be dispersed or at least that Mironov be removed.

Mironov was squeezed from all sides. The Southern Front RVS and individual "commissar-Cossack eaters" held up the formation of the corps. Refugees from the Don told him new horror stories of violence against the Cossacks. Mironov decided to turn to Lenin, whom he now knew personally. The letter was sent of 31 July.

Mironov began with an account of his telegram of 24 June, after which he described the repressions on the Don and in Saratov guberniia. He wrote that news of mass executions did not surprise him

because I have already seen the main outlines of the communists' policy toward the Cossacks, who are guilty only of ignorance and illiteracy; guilty of the fatal mistake of having been born of free Russian peasantry who at some time ran away from the yoke of the boiars and their truncheons to the free steppe of the Don; guilty because the Russian people during the reign of Peter I stifled their freedom at the cost of their blood; guilty because after enslaving them the tsarist authorities became more attentive to the Cossacks and by means of long disciplinary regime exterminated their humane feelings and turned them into the police guards of Russian thought, of Russian life; guilty because agents of Soviet power paid them even greater attention and instead of the word of love brought to the Don and the Ural - revenge, arson, and destruction. How can we justify what those villains did in Veshenskaia, the village which first understood their fatal mistake and in January 1919 abandoned the Kachaevo- Bogucharskii Front? That behavior caused the massive rebellion on the Don. If it was not fatal, it was in any case an awful thing, fraught with endless consequences for the course of the whole revolution.

Again he offered examples of executions and pillaging. The 8th Army tribunals often shot Cossacks only for asking to be paid for horses and grain that were taken from them.

It is impossible, there is not enough time and paper, Vladimir Il'ich, to describe the horrors of "building communism" on the Don . . . A certain D. Varov in Pravda, #136, in an article "On the Don" touched upon the events in Veshenskaia, but feared apparently to offend the communists. For him these events were only "discomforting", and the Cossacks who rebelled against the violence and oppression became "White guard sympathizers" . . . Another Soviet correspondent, a certain A. V. poured all of the atrocities, violence, and horrors into the single phrase, "the not always tactful acts of the representatives of authority". The servile soul of the autocracy's scribblers has passed into the scribblers of the Soviet authorities. The people do not need their servants of the free word in servants' livery.

Mironov did not believe that Lenin knew what was going on:

I can not agree, I can not accept that you have looked perfunctorily on all these horrors, and that it was done with your approval. I can no longer be silent, I have not the strength to bear the people's suffering in the name of an abstract, far-distant something or other.

Turning to the situation on the Southern Front, Mironov explained to Lenin:

Only by successfully strengthening the rear might the fighting line of the front have been made invincible. To strengthen the rear it was necessary to understand its psychology, its peculiarities, its weak points, etc. Unfortunately, the political leaders of the Southern Front



did not have that knowledge . . . Our units marched forward in good order, causing no disturbances among the Cossacks, who had been told and written so much about the "atrocities" of the Bolsheviks. The impression, therefore, was most favorable . . . When our units had passed, the Political Departments of the armies, divisions, and brigades set about their organization, but unfortunately because of technical limitations and purely bureaucratic organization they were not able to carry out a single one of their grandiose plans . . . The hastily put together okrug and volost revolutionary committees did not understand their functions, they looked on the Cossacks with the eyes of suppressors. And then the requisitions, confiscations, arrests, and so forth began . . . The destruction of the Cossacks became an irrefutable fact, as soon as the Don became Soviet . . . I do not believe that honest factory workers have accepted the elimination of honest people and the shooting of innocent village workers like themselves, even in the name of social justice . . .

Mironov hurled the most serious accusation in Lenin's face:

What do we call these acts by the Reds? The whole activity of the communist party, led by you, is directed at the destruction of the Cossacks, at the destruction of mankind in general.

He recalled:

In a telegram to you, Vladimir Il'ich, I implored you to change the policy, to make a revolutionary concession, to

ameliorate the suffering of the people and by that step to attract the people to the side of Soviet power, to the side of strengthening the revolution . . . In these views, I repeat, I differ from the communists. This is the root of the distrust of me. And the communists are right. I will not support their policy of destruction of the Cossacks and then of the better-off peasants . . . I will not participate in this madness, which has just become evident to me, and with all the strength that is in me I will fight against the destruction of the Cossacks and the middle peasantry . . . I am in favor of leaving the peasants alone as far as their religion and traditions go and of leading them to a better life by our example, by demonstration, not by the fine, ringing phrases of half-baked communists, whose lips are still wet with milk, the majority of whom can not tell wheat from barley, although at meetings with great aplomb they teach the peasants how to farm.

In this emotional and not particularly coherent letter he repeats frequently his appeal to stop the destruction of the Cossacks:

I demand in the name of the revolution and on behalf of tortured Cossackdom a halt to the policy of their destruction . . . If this continues, we will have to stop fighting Krasnov and fight the communists,

Nonetheless the independent Mironov announced:

I will go to the end with the Bolshevik Party - if they conduct a policy which does not diverge in word or deed - as I have done so far . . .

At that point he produced his demands:

The social life of the Russian people, to which [category] the Cossacks belong, must be constructed in accordance with its historical, cultural, and religious traditions and views, and the future must be left to time . . . In carrying out the current struggle we had the opportunity to see . . .: for Marxism the present is only the means, and the future is only a goal. And if that is so, I refuse to take part in such construction in which the whole people and everything they have earned is squandered on the goal of a distant, abstract future. Is contemporary man not a goal? Is he really so bereft of organs of sensation that we want to build the happiness of some far-off mankind at the cost of suffering?! No, it is time to stop the experiments. The almost two-year experiment in the people's suffering must have convinced the communists that denying the human personality is madness.

The situation left Mironov deeply divided:

Because of my long-held revolutionary and social convictions, I do not want to ally myself with Denikin, Kolchak, Petliura, Grigor'ev, and the other counter-revolutionaries, but I look with equal repugnance upon the violence which false communists have inflicted upon the laboring people, and because of that I can not be their supporter either . . .

Mironov knew very well that his struggle with the evil, "caused by individual agents of authority", might cost him his life, but he was given strength by the certainty that his was not "an individual protest against this

evil spread across the face of the republic, but a collective protest, a protest of tens of millions of people."

Mironov wanted to remain a soldier of the revolution:

Suffering with all my soul for the laboring people and the possible loss of revolutionary conquests, I feel that I can render important assistance at this critical moment of the struggle under the following conditions: that there be a clear and definite policy on the Cossack question and complete trust in me and my independent but vitally healthy views. Whether I deserve that trust, you can judge by this letter.

Since this letter reflects not [only] my personal view of the situation, but the view of millions of peasants and Cossacks, I have thought it necessary to send copies of this letter at the same time to my many loyal friends.

Sincerely respectful of you and devoted to your ideas [I am]

Commander of the Don Corps, Citizen, Cossack of

Ust'-Medveditskaia stanitsa, Mironov.

Mironov did not receive a reply to his confession, his desperate call, his cri de coeur. The same was true of his telegram from Anna Station. Lenin read Mironov's letter. That is evidenced by notes in his hand, "important", "very important", "very good", and so forth. It is said that he received the letter after a long delay - not until the autumn. That is possible, though very strange. But, really, what could he have written in reply . . .

Not having received a reply to his appeal, Mironov made one more attempt to improve relations with the Soviet authorities. On 8 August he submitted to the Political Department a request "to register him as a member of the RKP"

and to bring that to the attention of Kalinin, Trotskii, and Lenin. The "Khopersk communists" refused with great pleasure. The situation on the front was bad. The breakthrough of Mamontov's cavalry corps had put Tambov and Kozlov in the Whites' hands. Inactivity became unbearable. Mironov began to prepare the corps for an attack on Denikin, reports of which reached the RVS of the Republic. I. Smigla, a TsK and RVSR member, whom Mironov trusted, ordered him by direct-line telegraph "not to dispatch a single unit without permission". In reply to Mironov's objections he invited him to come to Penza.

Mironov made ready for the trip, but the station master refused him the cars for his escort of 150 men, to which Smigla had agreed. On 18 August it became known that the Political Department had officially ordered the disbanding of the Don Corps on the grounds that Mironov was a "Grigor'evite". He could not travel without his escort. Mironov knew the commissars were set on violence. Mironov decided upon a demonstration. The denouement was approaching.

On August 22, Mironov issued his "Order-Proclamation". Having described the destruction of the Cossacks being carried out "by new Vandals, who have revived by their evil deeds the times of the Middle Ages and the inquisition", he declared:

There remains only one way to save the victories of the revolution: overthrow the communist party. As soon as this news from the Southern Front reaches the Cossacks, they will stop and abandon the generals and landlords, whom they have followed only in the name of trampled truths.

Citizen Cossacks and soldiers of Don Territory! We die on the front, spilling blood in unequal battle for land and for the true happiness of men, which only they themselves

can fashion, not a bunch of people who do not know life. By its appearance the corps will lift the spirits of Red soldiers. Remember, you are not alone. The true spirit of the suffering people is with you. If you die in battle, you die for truth. Christ loved truth and died for it. Better to die in the open field than to lie on one's stove resenting the people's suffering.

That same day Mironov spoke at a meeting. The next day he informed the Southern Front, ". . . I am setting out with the forces at my disposal to fight Denikin and the bourgeoisie."

On August 24, the day of the attack, he addressed a telegram to "Citizen member of the RVS of the Republic Smigla, copy to the Russian people". Mironov declared that he was not after the communists' blood and would not shoot first. He offered to make an alliance against Denikin to save the revolution:

. . . do not forget that the Paris Commune was killed by the common man. The Don Corps waits on your political wisdom and statesmanship in order to destroy Denikin with our common forces . . .

He issued an appeal to the Russian people:

Wearry Russian people, in view of your suffering and torment, and outrages upon yourself and your conscience - no honest citizen who loves the truth need bear this violence any more. Seize all the power, all the land, the factories and mills. And we, the true defenders of your interests, will fight your evil enemy General Denikin, believing deeply that you do not want the landlords and capitalists to

return, and that you will try, however hard it may be, you will apply all your strength to save the revolutionary front, to save the victories of the revolution.

On the red banners of the Don revolutionary corps is written: all land to the peasants, all factories and mills to the workers, all power to the people through true councils of workers, peasants, and Cossacks' deputies, elected by the workers on the basis of free socialist agitation. Down with the autocracy of commissars, who have ruined the revolution.

I am not alone. The true spirit of the people, which has suffered for truth, is with me, which guarantees that the revolution will be saved.

ALL SO-CALLED DESERTERS join me and form that terrible force before which Denikin will quake and the communists bow down. I call all who love truth and true freedom to the ranks of the corps.

The Corps set off planning to join up with the 23rd Division, which had been commanded by Mironov.

Vain were the hopes he had placed on the wisdom of the communists. "People who do not know life" knew well, however, the taste of power and perceived in Mironov's acts only an encroachment upon their power. Smigla issued a statement in which Mironov was declared a traitor, a rebel and an outlaw. It was ordered "deliver him alive or dead to the headquarters of Soviet forces". In the next order Mironov was accused of being in league with Denikin. Lenin ordered Sklianskii to have "Sokol'nikov's godchild" caught.

The Russian people were deaf to the call of their Messiah. No one came to help him. Under the influence of Smigla's order most of his soldiers deserted the Corps. With a detachment of 500 Mironov made his way through the forest paths, avoiding settlements. He tried to avoid fighting the Red units sent to capture him. There were only a few minor skirmishes in which ten men from both sides died. Finally on 14 September Mironov came across Budennyi's cavalry corps and surrendered to him without a fight.

The non-Cossack Budennyi planned to shoot the Cossack Mironov on the spot, but as bad luck would have it Trotskii was present and did not let him.

The RVSR chairman had his reasons. The political side of the matter interested him. Mironov and all of the men seized with him were sent to Balashov and handed over to a judicial-investigative commission (troika) headed by D. Poluian, a Kuban Cossack. Three days later the commission was given the powers of a tribunal.

Trotskii thought that "the trial ought to have a significant educational meaning for the Cossacks." As his personal emissary to Balashov he appointed Smigla who oversaw the whole trial.

Trotskii was kept informed. Before Mironov had been caught Trotskii had written an article, "Colonel Mironov", in the RVSR paper, V puti. His sharp revolutionary eye had discerned in Mironov "personal ambition, careerism, a desire to rise up on the backs of the laboring masses," even the intention to become the Don ataman. His next article, "Lessons of the Mironov movement", appeared when the corps commander was already in the tribunal's hands.

Trotskii interpreted even the fact that the corps had surrendered without a battle in a way that reflected badly on Mironov. But we ought not to judge Lev Davidovich too severely, because as his later behavior showed he did not believe what he wrote. To a fiery Party publicist like Trotskii propaganda



was more important than the truth. Because of that the unavoidable labels were applied to Mironov. He was declared the expression of the middle Cossacks' indecision; the Mironov movement was the embodiment of partisan movement which would have to be crushed. We must, however, give Trotskii his due: he was not blood-thirsty. Had Stalin been in his place, Mironov would have been put against the wall without delay.

The judicial procedure lasted three days. The hearings were open. The objectivity of the indictment would surprise Soviet citizens of the next generation who became used to well organized trials. It included Mironov's appeal and his conversation with Smigla, and described accurately his behavior after his rebellion. There was not a word about an association with Denikin. His acts were considered treasonous.

Mironov admitted his guilt, most of the accused denied it. The corps commander explained his motives in great detail and asked for mercy. At his request his letter to Lenin was admitted as evidence and a number of witnesses were questioned. The court also listened to the testimony of the "Khopersk communists".

Smigla acted as prosecutor. He exercised his rather informal eloquence at some length, apparently in imitation of his patron, Trotskii. He demanded that Mironov be shot, along with every tenth commander and one of every twenty of the remaining soldiers.

Mironov had a defender - Rybakov. He portrayed Mironov as a superlative military leader and the "lion of the revolution". (Smigla called him a drake.) Rybakov laid out his military service in detail. Mironov's only guilt was that "as a warrior of the Red Army he was a bad politician . . . and as a warrior he was direct in his actions." Rybakov was not afraid to name the true causes of the rebellion - repression on the Don, indifference of the

authorities to the fate of the Cossacks, and the silence of Lenin. He compared Mironov's acts with Trotskii's declaration "I can not be silent!" The defender asked the court to pardon Mironov.

In his final words Mironov dwelt on what had brought him to the court. Without denying his guilt, he made reference to his political ignorance (he had not read Marx) and begged indulgence, "I ask you for probation, give me a chance to remain a revolutionary warrior and prove that I can defend Soviet power . . ."

The sentence ordered that Mironov and another ten men from among the commanders and communists be shot and the rest be imprisoned for various terms - to be carried out at midnight.

That occurred on October 7. But on that same day before the court's sentence was executed the fate of the accused be determined by Trotskii in a telegram to Smigla:

The report on Mironov's trial leads me to think that we ought to provide a lenient sentence. In view of Mironov's behavior, I think that such a decision would be expedient. The slowness of our advance on the Don necessitates that we increase our political influence among the Cossacks with the purpose of causing a schism. For that mission we might, maybe, be able to use Mironov, by bringing him to Moscow after sentencing, pardoning him through the TsIK with the obligation of working in the rear area to cause an uprising

. . .

All that, we hope, is clear. Expedient to use Mironov to cause a schism among the Cossacks. This is a high-stakes game involving the fates of people,

the country, the revolution, and the court, which like the VTsIK, are simply instruments in the game, like hockey sticks.

Smigla heeded his boss's wishes. The next day the court sent a petition to pardon the prisoners to Moscow. They had already taken from the prisoners their "word of honor to serve Soviet power and the revolution honestly in the future." The spectacle had turned out well. The educational purpose had been achieved.

The long hours and days of waiting to be executed cost Mironov and his comrades dearly. Mironov described them two weeks later when he was in Moscow. The convicts at their request were put together in a single room where they sang, wrote letters, and talked . . .

. . . death in battle is not frightening: one moment . . .  
and it is all over. But the consciousness of close,  
inevitable death is horrifying, when there is no hope, when  
you know that nothing can halt the approaching grave, when  
until the frightful moment there remains less and less time,  
and finally when they say to you, "your pit is ready".

Even the hardy communist Smigla, who did not recognize the existence of the soul, was touched by the appearance of Mironov:

Mironov aged overnight. When I told him that I would  
petition about a pardon, the old man (The commander was 47,  
Smigla was 20 years younger) broke down and sobbed. It was  
easier for the old soldier to part with life than to return  
to it.

Did Smigla recall that when he was waiting to be shot in 1937?

The VTsIK's pardon was issued on 8 October, but the prisoners were told of it only four days later. Mironov wrote an application for Party membership.

The Cossacks are deserting Denikin altogether. Appropriate guarantees must be established that Denikin might be replaced by Mironov and his comrades, who will have to go to the heart of the Don.

The plan did not find support - because of the "autonomy", which seemed excessive even in quotation marks.

Mironov and his men were sent to Moscow under guard, where a commission under Dzerzhinskii looked them over. The impression was favorable. On 23 October the Politbiuro ordered that they all be pardoned and sent to the army. Mironov was treated separately. He was accepted into the Party on the standard basis and put on the staff of the Don Executive Committee. On how he was to be used opinions differed. Lenin and Kamenev supported the idea of the Don Executive Committee, Krestinskii favored a command, Kalinin - abstained. (Good old Mikhail Ivanovich wanted to avoid responsibility; he later refrained from helping Mironov in a time of mortal danger.) Because the majority was so small it was decided to get the opinion of Trotskii, who was absent. And what do you think? L.D. said that Colonel Mironov, the careerist, the Denikinist, and the Cossack ataman, should be sent to the Southwest Front in a command position. Nothing came of this, however, mainly because Mironov was at the limit of his strength.

He wrote an appeal to the Don Cossacks, which was approved by the TsK, and then went to Nizhni Novgorod to see his wife. On the way he contracted typhus and was hospitalized. In early December he returned to Moscow, where he met with Lenin and Dzerzhinskii.

On the Don Mironov found another policy pursued by the Soviet authorities. A sea of spilt blood and failures on the Denikin front had convinced Moscow that they could not fight their own population with

impunity. It would be better to attract them to the Soviet side, especially the Cossacks, who were so valuable to the army. In September 1919, Trotskii formulated "Guiding principles of current policy on the Don", which was the basis of the TsK's thesis "On work on the Don". Now - temporarily, of course - the approach to the Cossacks would not be determined by class principles, but by their relations with the Red Army. The troops and organs of power received instructions not to commit violence and to pay in time and in full for all items of supply.

Everything is better understood by comparison, even misfortune. After the shootings and requisitions of 1919 the "surplus appropriation system" of 1920, which was none too gentle, did not seem all that bad to the Cossacks.

Mironov became head of the land section of the Don Executive Committee. It was a familiar matter, but life in the rear oppressed him. All his thoughts were directed toward the front. Mironov wrote a few appeals to Cossacks serving with Vrangel'.

In July 1920 the Second Horse Army was formed on the Vrangel' Front under the command of Budennyi's divisional commander O.I. Gorodovikov. In their first battles they experienced defeats. Then they remembered about that useful man Mironov. On August 30 the RVS of the Republic at the request of the Southwest Front (Egorov, Stalin) appointed F. K. Mironov commander of the Second Horse Army.

Mironov practically flew to Tavria, where he found the army in rather bad condition: badly shrunken units, a half literate command staff, only 2760 horsemen, 130 machine guns, and 19 artillery pieces. Mironov worked non-stop. Along with reinforcements sent by the army, numerous volunteers from the Don joined him. By the end of September he already had 6228 horsemen.

On September 20 an independent Southern Front, under the command of M. V. Frunze with RVS member S. I. Gusev, was formed to fight Vrangeli. Poluian, the former chairman of the Balashov tribunal, was put on the Second Horse Army's RVS. Mironov took these Jesuitical insults badly. Frunze and Gusev sent a telegram of protest to Moscow, but they were unable to change anything. Apparently someone in the center had decided that Poluian would be a good watch dog and at the same time a live warning to the commander.

On October 8 Vrangeli's shock units began the Trans-Dnepr operation to consolidate their hold on the right bank. The Second Horse Army stood in their way. The Whites took Nikopol but were unable to get any further. At the cost of huge losses the Second Horse destroyed some crack White units (Barbovich's corps, Markov and Kornilov's divisions, and Babiev's cavalry) and drove them back across the Dnepr. The might of Vrangeli's army was sapped, its spirit broken, its death agony begun. At the height of the battle Mironov himself led his cavalry in attack. His horse was shot out from under him.

Distrust of Mironov showed through now and again nonetheless. During the battles in Northern Tavria the commander-in-chief, and later Voroshilov and Budennyi, tried to unite the Second Horse Army to the First. Frunze put a stop to their attempts.

The success of the Second Horse undermined Voroshilov and Budennyi's dominance in the cavalry. Moreover, Frunze, who was one of the most authoritative and independent of the Red Army leaders, did not particularly like the commanders of the First Horse. When they received transfer orders from the Polish Front, Voroshilov and Budennyi tried to have themselves subordinated to the commander-in-chief instead of to the Front. Lenin and S. S. Kamenev rejected that attempt. Upon their arrival in Tavria, which was much delayed (we have discussed the reasons), the Horse Army RVS tried again

to impose their conditions and put forward their own plan for taking the Crimea. The commander-in-chief did not bother to look it over. As a result, during the attack on the peninsula Frunze preferred to keep the First Horse in reserve and entered the fray only on the sixth day.

We refrain from describing the combat in the Crimea. That has been done well enough in Dushen'kin's book. It is interesting to note, however, that Makhno's Insurgency Army, which fought against Vrangeli' on the side of the Reds, was also subordinated to Mironov. Mironov was not afraid to take the Gulia-Pole anarchists under his command. He used them brilliantly in the decisive battle on Litovsk peninsula when the White's desperate counterattack almost drove into the sea Frunze's forces, which had broken through onto the Crimea. This is how Mironov described the events of November 11:

The 52nd and 15th Rifle Divisions were overrun by the Whites and retreated in disorder. General Barbovich's cavalry, and Drozdov and Kornilov's cavalry units, which were mostly composed of crack officer units for whom there was nothing left to do but die, broke through to the north and threatened to break into the rear of the 6th Army. Hard after the retreating Red armymen galloped the White cavalry with blades bared, sweeping the retreating Red armymen from their path with wild yells and whistles. Head on into the brutish band appeared the lava-flow of the 16th and 2nd Cavalry Divisions; the correlation of forces was one to three. The lava-flows neared one another. Cries of "hurrah" drowned out the machine gun fire and the explosion of shells. Now only a thousand paces, seven hundred, five hundred. Sabers clashed. Suddenly the 2nd Horse units

galloped aside, and 250 machine guns brought up on carts behind the Red cavalry opened up on the enemy a deadly automatic fire. Horses and men rolled on the ground. The first ranks were wiped out, the rear turned back and in their turn fell under the rifle and machine-gun fire of the 51st Rifle Division (Blokher's - authors). The enemy fled in panic.

On the machine-gun carts sat Makhno's men. The song writers later always forgot that the "tachanka" - a light carriage with a machine gun - was first used by Makhno and was his main weapon.

The Whites raced into the depths of the Crimea. That same day Frunze offered Vrangeli' a truce, guaranteeing those who surrendered their lives and a chance to leave the country. The next day Lenin reprimanded the Front commander for his liberalism, but more about that later.

On the evening of the 11th, Mironov and Makhno finished off Barbovich and occupied Voinka Station. On the 12th they were in Dzhankoi and a day later in Simferopol. The First Horse followed after, staying a day's march behind.

The campaign was over. Vrangeli' did not reply to Frunze's offer, but on November 13 he disbanded his army, leaving everyone to his own fate.

Mironov was at the zenith of military glory. The decisive contribution of the Second Horse to the conquest of the Crimea was acknowledged by all. Mironov was decorated with Honorary Revolutionary Arms (a sword with a gilt hilt and overlaid with an Order of the Red Banner) and then along with 200 soldiers of the Second Horse with an Order of the Red Banner. His was his first decoration; at Tsaritsyn he had only been recommended for one, but for some unknown reason the award had not been made.



The war ended, and the Second Horse was made into the 2nd Horse Corps. But the struggle continued. On November 23, Frunze gave an ultimatum to Nestor Makhno, who during the Crimean campaign had remained in Guliai-Pole with a large force, to disband all of his detachments. Makhno did not capitulate and was declared an enemy of Soviet power. Mironov was thrown into the fray with Makhno. These punitive functions were like a sharp knife in his heart. He read Frunze's orders to his men, but he also ordered them to avoid a clash. At the same time he requested that Moscow recall him: he did not want to fight against his recent comrade-in-arms. The center agreed that it would be best to transfer Mironov to other duties, but for the time being he was to remain in his position - until a new commander arrived. The Horse Corps wandered about the Southern Ukraine for more than a month reluctantly pursuing the elusive Makhno. Finally they were transferred to the Caucasus Front (Likhaia Station). Only in January 1921 did Mironov receive his new appointment - as assistant commander-in-chief (chief inspector) of cavalry.

The last act of Mironov's tragedy had begun. Having turned his command over to N. D. Tomin, he left Usmanskaia Station for Moscow on January 30. The hero was given special accommodations: a Pullman car for himself, his wife, two orderlies, and a cook, and a heated car for two horses and a machine-gun cart. He traveled without a guards unit. What would he need the guards for when at practically every station he was met triumphantly by crowds, orchestras, official greetings . . . ?

After the festive ceremony at Rostov, Smigla visited Mironov's car. The conversation was friendly, now the frightful days of the Balashov trial could be recalled with humor . . . But Mironov may have forgiven and forgotten too soon. The Cheka, as is expected of it, was wide awake. The situation on the Don was not at all good. The "surplus appropriation system" was bleeding the

Cossacks dry and turning them once again against the authorities. Of course, it was much the same throughout rural Russia. The politically unsophisticated muzhiks did not want to give away all of the grain they had raised for some ideal which they did not yet understand. The de-mobilized Red army men returned to their homes, and when their grain was taken, they got no discount. Peasant riots and uprisings broke out all over the country. At first the Soviet authorities did not take them very seriously. At that time - in early February - the chairman of the VTsIK, Kalinin, was in the Kuban. A local worker complained to him:

It's bad, they take the appropriations from us at the point of a gun. They come, and they take everything. The old women beg them to at least leave something for the children or for the horses, but they only shout, "Take it all." And they really do take everything, they don't leave anything . . .

Kalinin, the muzhik from Tver, replied:

Of all people we must not offend the Cossacks. They are a warlike people, they will start an uprising, there will be disorder. But as much as it might like to, the government can not do anything differently, because it would be criminal if in one part of the state the people had more than enough to eat while in another they were literally starving. The government must take the last giblet from the peasant who has and can give for those who are starving . . . (authors - our emphasis)

Well, who would have thought, what an imp, excuse me, a dialectician. Of all people not to offend and take to the last gible

famine, therefore we will take everything from you. What those people would eat, all of whose grain was taken, Mikhail Ivanovich was not prepared to discuss at this historical stage.

The Cossacks for the umpteenth time found their treatment unreasonable and took to their guns. A former regimental commander of the 23rd "Mironov" division, Vakulin, rebelled in the northern Don Territory and in early February 1921 occupied Kamyshin. In his proclamations he promised the Cossacks the support of the Tambov leader Antonov, as well as of Mironov and Budennyi. The 2nd Horse Corps, now without Mironov, was sent to put the rebellion down.

In these extremely tense circumstances Mironov decided to visit his native territory on his way from Rostov to Moscow. In a word: "In Europe it is cold, in Italy it is warm. Power is as repulsive as the hands of the barber." Mironov's visit was not welcomed by the Don Cheka and its head, Burov. Dispatches flew on ahead of the army commander with directions to redouble vigilance and to take measures.

Immediately upon his arrival at Ust'-Medveditskii Mironov spoke at a large meeting which had been called by the revolutionary committee. He called upon the Cossacks to preserve the peace and promised to help correct the mistakes of the local authorities. The village Party organization delegated him to a regional conference, which was to open in Mikhailovka village where Vakulin - who, by the way, held an Order of the Red Banner - had recently raised his rebellion. Mironov was in a hurry to get to Moscow, but allowed himself to be persuaded by his fellow villagers.

The next day a group of his comrades from the 23rd Division gathered around him. Among them was a certain Skobinenko, a "surplus" appropriator, who was also a civilian informer for the Cheka. Skobinenko had a definite

assignment and led the discussion around to abuses of the local authorities. Mironov spoke candidly. In his opinion, the continuation of grain requisitioning would cause new rebellions by spring. Before they broke up the men present at the meeting agreed to send coded messages to Mironov in Moscow to keep him informed of events on the Don. The material on Mironov was ready, what came later would only add to it.

At the conference Mironov attacked the local Cheka by speaking openly of the disorders they had caused. He asked that they permit private trade and that they replace expropriations by a direct tax, in a word, put an end to "war communism". These heretical demands horrified the local commissars. They dispersed the conference and put Mironov under arrest.

Similar heresies were being discussed at the time in the Politbiuro. On 16 February they decided to publish an article for discussion on a tax in kind. But what is permitted to Jupiter would land the bull in Lubianka. Mironov's wife and several of the conference participants were also arrested. Sklianskii informed Lenin that Mironov was under arrest by the local Cheka charged with attempting to incite rebellion. That much is documented. Lenin's reaction is unknown.

The Kremlin leaders had all they could handle at the time - peasant rebellions, the Kronshtadt mutiny, and in the Party the discussion on trade unions and the 10th Congress (March 8-16). After the sounds of the Congress' debates had died away, after expropriation was replaced by a tax in kind, and the Kronshtadt sailors had been suppressed, Mironov still sat in jail - true, not in the Lubianka, but in the Butyrka.

We ought not to judge the VCheka chairman Dzerzhinskii too harshly. To his other difficult duties the Party had added the post of People's Commissar of Transportation. Returning from Kronshtadt, Feliks suddenly ordered that

Mironov and his comrades be quickly brought to Moscow. In the complex Lubianka organization it is not easy to find a man . . .

March drew to a close, but still the Mironov matter was not settled. An unhurried investigation was under way. In the middle of the month he declared a hunger strike - in vain. Several times during walks he met his wife, who was also being held there. The regime, apparently, was not yet well established. They even gave Mironov newspapers, even a pen and paper. Having lost hope, on 30 March he wrote a last confession:

A Party letter. To chairman of the VTsIK citizen M. I. Kalinin.

Copies: Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars  
V. I. Ulianov.

Chairman of the RVS of the Republic L. D. Trotskii.

Chairman of the TsK RKP L. B. Kamenev . . .

It was a long letter. Mironov rejected the charges against him, and discussed the provocation of the Don Cheka. He asked, why am I in prison? Because I was ready to lead Red forces on Bucharest, Budapest, and so forth? Because I protested against the abuses and mistakes which the Party and its leaders have admitted, and demanded the establishment of a tax which has now been introduced by law?

. . . People in general, and I all the more, do not lie in the face of death, for I have not lost faith in my god, who is embodied in conscience. As I have always done all my life with friends and enemies alike . . . I repeat, that is my god, and I have not and I will not cease to pray to him as long as there is a soul in my frail body . . .

. . . and if you, Mikhail Ivanovich, remain deaf until 15 April 1921, I will die of starvation in prison . . .

. . . I do not want to admit the thought that the Soviet authorities on the basis of false and unfounded denunciations would guillotine one of their best fighters, "the valiant commander of the 2nd Horse Army" (RVS order of 4/12/20) . . .

. . . Let there not be this shameful page to gladden Generals Krasnov and Vrangeli, who were beaten by me . . .

I remain with deep faith in the truth - former Army Commander of the 2nd Horse Army, communist F. K. Mironov.

Mikhail Ivanovich remained deaf. Nor did the other chairmen raise their voices. But Mironov had hope. On the day he sent the letter he made plans to see his wife on April 2, thinking that by that time he would have an answer. But something else happened that day. All of the prisoners' walks were cancelled. Except Mironov's. He was led out to walk in the stone enclosure of the inner yard. The guard shot once . . . That is how many years later one of the wardens of Butyrka tells it.

Once again we are told with regret that Mironov's letter did not reach the addressee. Or rather, not quite that way. Comrade Kalinin did read it, but it was too late. Recall that Lenin's telegram pardoning N. Gumilev also arrived late. "It is too late," said Lafayette to the king's messengers. What can we do? We will believe . . . in good intentions.

The Mironov case with all its documents has survived. There is a card on which is written in pencil in an unknown hand, "Shot by a decision of the VCheka collegium 2 April 1921." The others arrested in connection with the Mironov case were held a while longer in prison and then released without

trial. His wife was also freed. In 1922 Kalinin summoned her. Their conversation was long, but not a word was said about Mironov's death. The all-union elder had showed he had a heart; he gave orders to give her a pass to Mineralnye Vody spa in the Caucasus. In 1924 the People's Commissariat for Army and Navy established a personal pension for her.

After that it was as if Mironov had been forgotten. True, Smigla mentioned him not unkindly in his memoirs in the twenties. Then silence fell. Mironov does not figure in the encyclopedias and books on the history of the civil war. From 1937 he became a traitor and rebel. Mironov's military accomplishments were transferred to Budennyi, and partially to Gorodovikov.

We do not know who ordered Mironov killed. Possibly the authorities tired of bothering with the refractory Cossack, especially after the war was over. Maybe the Kronshtadt mutiny decided his fate: he could be seen as the center of future insurrections. It is also very likely that some personal scores were being settled - maybe by someone of those who would have served under the new inspector of cavalry. (Two years later Budennyi was assigned to that post.)

It is more than likely that Kalinin read the letter in time. But it would not have been like him to intervene for a prisoner before the fearsome Cheka. Who has forgotten how after the pardon in 1919 he washed his hands of it in the Politbiuro.

In 1956 during the revelations and rehabilitations, in the torrent of crocodile tears for the millions of innocent victims, Mironov was remembered also. For four years the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court batted the case back and forth until they came to the portentous conclusion: "Abrogate

the order of the Presidium of the VCheka of 2 April 1921 in regard to F. K. Mironov and dismiss the case for lack of criminality in his actions."

That was it. They abrogated an order which had not been. We therefore did not learn who was guilty of Mironov's death. However, those who had his death on their hands responded quickly. In 1961 twenty-five former commanders and political workers of the First Horse Army sent an angry letter to the TsK demanding that the Military Collegium's decision be laid aside. There was no answer.

The most famous cavalryman was still not reconciled. In 1966 a display was erected at the Central Museum of the Soviet Army dedicated to the Second Horse and Mironov. Budennyi was invited to the opening. When he saw the photograph of Mironov, the marshal reddened and stamped his feet. Some feared for his health. The museum workers found a Solomonic solution. Mironov was replaced by Gorodovikov. Budennyi gradually calmed down. After his departure the display was restored to its former appearance. But every time the marshal visited, Mironov's portrait had to be removed.

Mironov stands by himself among the great Red military leaders. The others, whatever their pasts might have been, were serving people of the new authorities. Mironov, while a soldier, remained a revolutionary. He understood revolution as the free creativity of the people creating new ways of life for themselves.

For others the revolution ended with the seizure of power and the formation of a new national leadership. For Mironov, on the other hand, that was only the beginning. It was his conviction that only the people could determine their future, determine it according to their own understanding, and not at the instruction of people "distant from life". And they do it for themselves without sacrificing the living to Party dogma for the doubtful sake



of future generations. Mironov wanted freedom and justice for the people in his own day. He firmly believed that they needed it as much as their descendants. Only the people were sovereign, not the commissars, the Cheka, the TsK or SNK.

Having come to power as a result of the October coup, the new state-political leadership usurped the governing powers of the Russian people. All decisions of the TsK came to be passed off as the will of the revolution. This form of government took the name dictatorship of the proletariat. Everyone understood, of course, that the dictatorship was run not by the working class, which was still laughably small - one-and-a half to two million in a population of 150 million - but by the communist party, or more precisely by the Party elite, who were actually beyond any other control and were irremovable.

The higher Red Army commanders were with few exceptions officers of the old army.<sup>7</sup> Nicholas II's abdication freed them from their former oaths. They swore themselves to the new authorities and served them faithfully. Any directive, any order from above was obligatory for them regardless of its purpose or content. Nor were the communists in the best of positions. Their revolutionary consciousness was not free, but subordinate to the will of the TsK. Every decision of the Party leadership had to be carried out, or one ceased to be a member of the Party. It is hard to imagine that every Bolshevik, and they numbered in the hundreds of thousands, agreed with the destruction of the Cossacks, but practically all who were ordered to do so put the savage directive of January 29 into effect.

If the communists were deprived of free will, what might be said of the officers over whom hung the damnation of unclean birth and past service. Only unquestioning obedience gave them any sort of guarantee for their lives,

otherwise they faced being accused of treason and shot. This is not to speak of the officers who were killed for no reason at all, for example those who were drowned in the Volga at Stalin and Voroshilov's orders. They all weigh on the conscience regardless of their background. The former landlord and lieutenant Tukhachevskii skillfully commanded the suppression of the Kronshtadt mutiny, after which he was sent to suppress the Tambov peasants. Iakir, the school drop-out from a poor Jewish family, not only directed mass executions but created a program of genocide, which such masters of that sort of business as Hitler, Goebbels, and Rosenberg would have signed with both hands.<sup>8</sup>

Mironov cannot be cast in the role of suppressor. He fought according to the dictates of his conscience and wanted to fight only those whom he considered enemies of freedom. He was opposed to shooting peaceful villagers, prisoners, and even rebels. Because of that he fought passionately against de-Cossackization and the slaughter of peasants. He, therefore, did not want to fight Makhno's Insurgency Army. Mironov knew that he was being sent against Makhno, with whom he had recently fought on the same side, not because of pillaging, but because he would not submit to Moscow's will. To be sure, Makhno's boys liked to indulge themselves at others' expense, but such sins were more than sufficient on the Red army's side.

Mironov was in some ways like Makhno and Antonov, who, whatever the official historians might say of them, were ideological fighters. These men believed that they had the right to their own - not co-ordinated with the Kremlin - understanding of freedom and fought for that freedom.

A folk intelligent, a born commander, a true individual, a philanthropist, and truthseeker, Mironov was doomed, as was everyone else who did not care to or could not become an industrious cog in the new governmental machine. It

would not mean much to say that he would not have outlived 1937. We can not imagine him commissar-obedient after war's end in either the army or civil service. Mironov was killed by personal enemies, but had their attempt been unsuccessful some other conflict with the authorities would have awaited Mironov - soon and undoubtedly fatal.

It is deeply symbolic that during the civil war Mironov was forgiven for independence and even rebellion, but he was dealt with in the first days of victory. The new authorities, who called themselves revolutionary, needed a strong army, which they called the defense of the revolution. But for the lion of the revolution, Mironov, and other real revolutionaries, as distinct from tame revolutionaries, there was no longer room - not in this army, not in this life.



## Chapter 8

### 1921: Suppression

The Red Army's victory over Vrangeli' concluded the larger civil war in European Russia. For two more years campaigns were waged in Central Asia and in the Far East, which resulted in the conquest of those outposts of the former empire. In that time the Army found a new occupation, which did not bring it martial glory, but which was vitally important for the new state. In this little civil war the RKKA finished off the partisan movements, which for propaganda purposes were called bandit gangs: their recent ally Makhano, the Polish mercenary Tiutiunnik, and many others. In 1921 the mailed fist of the Army crushed two other popular uprisings: the soldiers and sailors at Kronshtadt, and the peasants at Tambov. These two episodes of the Army's history deserve special attention for several reasons, not the least of which is that in both cases the Red forces were commanded by Mikhail Tukhachevskii.

On the basis of a false historical analogy one might assume that the victorious side in a civil war might display magnanimity to the defeated enemy, or at least mercy. It would seem there could not be a better way to quickly heal the open wounds of the recent slaughter, to erase the bloody memories from the national memory, to douse the violent flames of hatred and brutality. As much as or more than its daily bread, the country needed national reconciliation, which alone could ensure a peaceful future. The Americans took that path after their bitter civil war. In Russia things went differently.

In 1921 when most of the country was free of civil war, the regime became harsher. It was a direct result of the victory. The Bolshevik leaders felt that at last there was neither in the country nor beyond its borders a power

that could quickly overthrow them, and they began to consolidate their authority. It is not contradictory that the New Economic Policy was proclaimed that same year. NEP was only a tactical maneuver in the economic sphere, a forced retreat in the face of famine and growing popular dissatisfaction, mostly on the part of the peasants. Trotskii, by the way, had suggested ending the direct expropriation of grain from the peasantry as early as February 1920.

Political authority became openly totalitarian. Extraordinary powers that had earlier been justified by the conditions of wartime now became normal. The pervasive punitive apparatus and its product, the GULag, grew stronger. The limitations on civil rights lost their temporary character, and became more widespread and more severe. The last non-Bolshevik organs of the press were closed, censorship was made stringent. The Orthodox Church, whose congregation had until recently comprised the majority of the Russian population, was dealt a mortal blow. Other religious sects did not fare better. All parties, except the Bolsheviks, were utterly liquidated. The communists, in this fashion, achieved a monopoly on ideology and political activity.

In the Bolshevik Party itself an Arakcheevan<sup>1</sup> regime was more and more tightly imposed, rooting out the weak shoots of inner-party democracy in the form of factions and groups. Lenin's infamous resolution "On Party Unity" was enacted immediately after victory in the civil war. During the mortal struggle for the existence of the party and its power it had been alright to dispute and to insist on one's own point of view, but when that battle had been won, such freedom became an unallowable luxury. Lenin's argument, that the more or less open debate about trade unions had made the party vulnerable to criticism by the netite bourgeoisie and had brought the party to the brink

of catastrophe, ought not to be understood literally.<sup>2</sup> The leadership which realized its power over the country through the Party, considered this a suitable moment to strengthen its dominant position. The clash of opinions expressed in bitter polemics and conflicting resolutions at annual conferences had undermined the authority of the top leaders and interfered with truly scientific leadership. Compulsory unity, reminiscent of the inviolability of church dogma, opened the way to the absolute power of the apparatus - and to the dictatorship of Stalin.

Total cruelty as a form of government policy was given clear expression in the fall of 1920. When it became clear that the Reds would win the Crimean campaign, Frunze gave in to unforgiveable weakness and attempted to avoid unnecessary bloodshed. On November 11 he addressed the commander of the White forces:

In view of the uselessness of further resistance by your troops, which threatens only to shed superfluous streams of blood, I suggest you cease your resistance and surrender with all of the forces of your army and navy, military reserves, supplies, arms and all other military goods.

In the case that you accept this offer the Revolutionary Military Council of the armies of the Southern Front, on the basis of the powers bestowed upon it by the central Soviet authority, guarantees the surrendering forces, including its highest commanders, full pardon for all their offenses connected with the civil war. All of those who choose not to remain and work in socialist Russia will be given an opportunity to

emigrate without hindrance on the condition that they promise to refrain from waging further war against workers'-peasants' Russia and Soviet authority. I expect a reply before 2400 hours on November 11.

Moral responsibility for all possible consequences of refusing this honorable offer lies on you. . .

This appeal was broadcast by radio. At the same time the Revolutionary Military Council of the Southern Front (M. Frunze, I. Smilga, B. Kun, M. Vladimirov) addressed the following appeal, also by radio, "to the officers, soldiers, Cossacks, and sailors of Vrangel's army":

We do not seek revenge. All who lay down their arms will be given the chance to expiate their guilt before the people by honest labor. If Vrangel' rejects our offer, you are obliged to lay down your arms against his will. . .

At this same time we are issuing an order to Soviet troops about chivalrous behavior toward those who surrender and the merciless extermination of those who raise arms against the Red Army.

The next day Lenin dressed his commander down in a telegram, reminding him that he was "endowed with powers by the central Soviet authority":

I have just learned of your offer to Vrangel to surrender. I am extremely surprised by the excessive leniency of your conditions. If the enemy accepts them, you will have to expedite the seizure of the fleet to ensure that not one ship is permitted to escape; if the



enemy does not accept these terms, you must not repeat them and deal with the enemy mercilessly.<sup>3</sup>

Frunze's appeal went unanswered, which did not save him from having to do Party penance. Vrangeli' preferred flight to capitulation. He managed to escape by sea with 83,000 others, military personnel and refugees. Tens of thousands more remained on the Crimea - peaceful citizens from all over Russia and rear-guard units covering the flight of the White Army. Soviet sources say nothing about prisoners, as if there were none. Only in the unpublished memoirs of F. Mironov do we find that the Second Horse Army took 25,000 prisoners. Maiakovskii has the following lines in his poem "Khorosho" (1927):

"Vrangeli' is driven into the sea. No prisoners. An end -  
for the time being . . ."<sup>4</sup>

No prisoners. It is possible, quite possible that the poet knew what that meant. P. I. Lavut, who organized his public readings, was an eyewitness to the events on the Crimea. That is mentioned in the poem.

Captured officers of Vrangeli's army were shot. So were many other soldiers and refugees. Some who escaped captivity in mid-November fled to the mountains and joined the Green partisan units. They could not escape the Crimea. All the shoreline and the narrow isthmus to the mainland were controlled by the Reds. After several months of pursuing them, the Soviet authorities on the Crimea called upon them to lay down their arms and save their lives. Many did surrender. All were shot.

We know practically no details of this action. One eyewitness claimed that 80,000 were shot.<sup>5</sup> The fiery revolutionaries, Rozaliia Zemliachka and Bela Kun, members of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Southern Front, were in charge of the operation.<sup>6</sup> There is no information about Frunze's

participation. The role of the leaders in Moscow is also unknown. Bela Kun was removed from the Crimea with a reprimand, but that happened in 1922.

If Vrangeli was a strong military enemy, the Kronshtadt rebellion posed a different sort of danger - political. The sailors' slogan "Soviets without Bolsheviks" threatened to isolate the Bolsheviks from the population; it deprived them of their appropriated monopoly on revolutionary behavior. Lenin and his party could not discard the slogan "Power to the people". Without that they would be as superfluous as the Constituent Assembly, which they had disbanded. The Red Army men, most of them peasants, had fought not for the Bolsheviks but for the Soviets of Workers' Deputies, in which they saw their own power.<sup>7</sup> The destruction of the tender shoots of democracy, the suppression and liquidation of other political parties, occurred behind the back of the populace without publicity. If all of Russia would draw the conclusions to which the Petrograd workers and Kronshtadt sailors had come, the Bolsheviks would not have been able to retain control of the Red Army -- the shield and sword of Bolshevik power.

The conclusions drawn by the revolutionary class in the cradle of the revolution were discomfiting for Lenin and his colleagues. The true proletariat decided to fight a third revolution against famine and the violence of the Cheka and the bureaucrats. In February 1921 Petrograd was paralyzed by strikes (those holding power preferred to call them slowdowns). In a proclamation dated February 27 we read:

. . . Workers and peasants need freedom. They do not wish to live by Bolshevik fiat. They want to determine their own fate. Comrades, preserve revolutionary order. Organize and insistently demand: the liberation of all arrested socialists and unaffiliated workers; the lifting

of martial law, freedom of expression, of the press, and of association for all workers; free re-election of factory committees, professional unions and soviets.

The next day in the Nevskii region the following appeal was pasted to walls:

. . . We know who fears the Constituent Assembly. It is those who will no longer be able to steal, who will have to answer to the national delegates for deceit, for theft, for all crimes.

The fall of Bolshevik authority in Kronshtadt occurred suspiciously easily. Only a third of the communists opposed the rebellion, another third joined it, and the remaining third waited passively to see what would happen. The rebels published a new paper, News (Izvestiia) of the provisional revolutionary committee of sailors, soldiers and workers". Here are a few excerpts from it:

What is happening now was caused by the communists themselves, by their bloody, destructive work. Letters from the villages are full of complaints and damnation of the communists. . .

The peasant was right who said at the 8th Soviet Congress: 'Everything is all right except. . . the land is ours, but the grain is yours; the water is ours, but the fish are yours; the forests are ours, but the wood is yours. . .' They shout from the bloody stage, all land to the peasants, factories to the workers. The communists. . . have sat on the neck of the poorest peasant more firmly than the landlords. . .<sup>8</sup>

Words were not enough to answer such pronouncements. The answer was written with the bullets and bayonets of the Red Army. The Army marched to suppress peasants and workers, their class brothers, who wanted only a better, freer life. The majority of those storming Kronshtadt had exactly the same reasons for dissatisfaction as the rebels.

After the failure of the assault on March 8, the big guns of the Army were brought to Petrograd: Chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council Trotskii, Chairman of the Cheka Dzerzhinskii, Commander-in-Chief Kamenev, Commander of the Western Front Tukhachevskii. The latter was temporarily put in charge of the 7th Army, which was reinforced by elite battalions of Red cadets. The first assault was timed to coincide with the opening of the 10th Party Congress. When it failed, a large detachment of political commissars were sent directly from the meeting - 300 delegates, 140 of them voting rights including Voroshilov, Bubnov, Dybenko, and S. Uritskii.

Tukhachevskii approached his task according to all of the rules of military art. He directed the attack from where the besieged defenders would least expect it, from the side of the Finnish Gulf on which the ice had begun to melt. It was risky, but the assaulting troops even dragged artillery across the ice. On the 16th the Party Congress was closed ahead of schedule because of unrest in the provinces. On the 17th Soviet troops, in white camouflage cloaks, advanced across the shaky ice to Kronshtadt. They quickly broke into the fortress, and all resistance soon stopped. The ships of the Baltic Fleet also surrendered. The leaders of the rebellion, including the commandant of the fortress, former General Kozlovskii, and the chairman of the revolutionary committee, the sailor Petrechenko, escaped to Finland.

At this point Soviet authors usually end their works. In only one instance do they describe losses. S. Uritskii in the first volume of the

fundamental work The Civil War 1918-1921, fixed the casualties as follows: the Reds lost 700 killed, and 2500 wounded and shocked; the Whites, that is the rebels, suffered 600 killed 100 wounded.<sup>9</sup>

No one has anything to say about what happened to those who were captured. Moreover. . . in the academic and naturally objective research of S. Semanov there is one interesting note:

While I was working on this monograph, I was able to converse with participants of the Kronshtadt mutiny. Altogether, I was able to find five. Several of them granted interviews but asked that I not use their materials. We will note only that they unanimously affirmed that only the leaders of the mutiny and officers who actively participated in it suffered repression. Workers, peasants, and sailors, who surrendered in Kronshtadt were demobilized or transferred to other fleets and units.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, only five could be found, and of them only a few (how many: two, one?) would speak with an honest historian, and not one would permit what he had said to be used, although they unanimously agreed that nothing untoward had happened. We will note only. . .

Breathing hard from the effort, poor S. Semanov contradicts both logic and Russian grammar in the preceding quotation, all to keep from saying too much. In another place in the same work, the thought he tries to hide shows through. On the one hand, he says, there were no Bolshevik atrocities; on the other, had there been, Russian emigres and western anti-Soviet writers would surely exaggerate them.

The matter is simple to explain. Those who fled were not able to see anything. Those who remained and lived knew something that even fifty years later they were reluctant to tell. Most of the rebels lost the ability to speak immediately.

Here is what I. Ts., a military engineer who commanded a battalion of cadets in the assault, has to say. After the surrender, his battalion comprised of three companies was marching in formation along a narrow street in the fortress when all of a sudden the rear company was opened up on in cross-fire at close range from basements. The company was almost wiped out. The maddened cadets surrounded the block and indiscriminately bayoneted all males "taller than the belt of an adult man." Revenge was not taken on the ambushers, according to I. Ts., because they apparently managed to escape (they had fired at the back of the last company). We will not trouble ourselves to judge who was more humane, or inhumane, the cadets or the mutineers firing from ambush.

Tukhachevskii was outraged. The battalion was declared a penal unit and deprived of the decorations that were given the other assault troops by the handful - in Petrograd district alone 350 were awarded. And their punishment did not end there. Along with other soldiers who had looted and raped, the cadets were ordered to execute the captured sailors. They drove them out onto the cracking ice of the Gulf and shot them. Thus died 7500 men. The whole mutinous garrison had numbered 12,000. Several of the cadets went out of their minds lying behind their machine-guns. March came, the ice soon melted, and the bodies of the sailors slipped beneath the water.

We do not know whether Tukhachevskii had anything to do with executions personally. Two months later, after a personal audience with Lenin, he was

put in charge of special troops in Tambov province, detailed to suppress a peasant rebellion.

The Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs), who had much more support among the peasants than the Bolsheviks, had the upper hand in Tambov. The Bolsheviks held on there after October only by the force of arms. Late in 1917 the provincial Congress of Soviets elected an all-SR executive committee. For the good of the working people it would have to be disbanded. Still many of the local workers considered themselves SRs. Evforitskii, the chairman of the provincial Soviet of People's Commissars was an SR; his comrade Bulatov headed the provincial militia.

At first the SRs refrained from active opposition to central Soviet authority. In 1918 they even supported the committees of poor peasants. That was probably an effect of their battle with the White Czechs, and because pressure from the populace was weak. From the beginning, however, the SRs were their own men. For example, in Nakhatnyi Ugol they formed a model SR commune, whose members worked the land and learned military skills. When grain requisitioning units came through the villages in 1920 after the civil war had ended in the region, the peasants rose up in rebellion. Aleksandr Antonov became their leader.

The son of a metal worker, Antonov had joined the SR Party in 1905, and before the February Revolution (1917) he had spent a long time in exile. His assistant, Ishin, had a similar biography. After October Antonov was sent from Tambov to Kirsanov as head of a county (uezd) militia, which he whipped into shape and armed well with weapons taken from the retreating Czechoslovakian Legion. During Mamontov's breakthrough, Antonov and his men became partisans. After the Whites were driven off, he did not return to regular service, but declared himself a defender of the peasants, whom he

considered oppressed by the Bolsheviks. The provincial Cheka could do nothing about this new detachment. Men loyal to Antonov, who served in local government organs and in the Cheka itself, always warned him in time.

The uprising began on August 20, 1920 and soon spread throughout the province. The driving force behind it was the peasants' dissatisfaction with grain requisitioning. In January 1921 the rebels controlled five counties: Tambov, Kirsanov, Borisoglebsk, Morshan, and Kozlov. They numbered 50,000 in two armies, which were organized in regiments, each attached to a particular territory. In many ways Antonov's armies copied the RKKA: they had commissars, political departments, and tribunals. An operational headquarters headed by Antonov directed all the rebellious forces. The source of their fighting spirit was the consciousness of each soldier that he was defending his home and his land. Intelligence was well organized.

The rebels formed their own party - the Union of Working Peasants. A peasant from the village of Inokovok, Tokmakov, headed its Provincial Committee, which carried out agitation among Red Army men sent to subdue them. Often their propaganda was most amateurish. The following flyer, which we have reproduced with its original flavor serves as a good example:

Mobilized friends it is time to wake up long enough we  
have listened to the arrogant communists porosites of the  
Whole working people. Down with the porosites of the  
Whole working people, down with the fratricidal war,  
mobilized friends throw down your weapons go home to  
defend your bread, earned by the sweat and blood of your  
civil rights. Remember mobilized brother know what you  
are doing, why are you defending these arrogant  
communists terrorists of the Whole working People. Down



with Lenin's Jewish decrees and the foul soviet. Long  
live the committee of the constituent assembly.  
Provincial committee.

The SRs' hand is obvious in other appeals:

You will find your rights in struggle. Mobilized Red  
Army men. End your ignorance. Stop your ignoble acts  
against the peasants, especially against the rebels. It  
is time for you to come to yourself, to be aware of your  
worthless conduct. Fighting the peasant rebellions with  
the communists, you turn the people's anger against  
yourself. Aren't your fathers, brothers and families in  
the same circumstances as the rebellious peasants,  
squeezed on every side by the communists and soviets?  
Look around you: where are the freedoms of speech,  
press, unions, association, and faith, the inviolability  
of the individual. . .

Soviet sources, especially those from the early twenties, acknowledged,  
had to acknowledge, the purely peasant, apolitical and spontaneous nature of  
the uprising. Hot on the tracks of the events it is harder to distort the  
truth. One wrote:

We cannot doubt, however, that the Antonov uprising,  
in which the leading active roles were taken by kulaks,  
deserters, the criminal element, and in part the 'village  
intelligentsia', also was supported by a spontaneous,  
usually passive, dissatisfaction of the greater peasant  
mass with the requisitioning policy of the Soviet  
authorities. The villages, if they did not actively

support the movement, did not hinder it, and where it came to guerrilla fighting showed similar support.<sup>11</sup>

A significant admission! On the one hand there were only kulaks, deserters, criminals, and the village intelligentsia, whom comrade Litovskii, unable to hide his revulsion, places in quotations marks. But there was also a small problem of another sort - grain requisitions - to which the peasant masses could not reconcile themselves. It is not surprising that the muzhiks did not hinder the rebels who were defending them from the thieves, the requisitioning detachments. It was more than that, the local peasants were the manpower of the uprising.

The tone of another book published at the height of the Antonovshchina was more vicious and abusive. What can you do? That is the freedom of the press! In it the rebels were:

. . . kulaks, vicious deserters from the Red Army, inveterate scoundrels and cutthroats - lovers of easy gain by theft and murder. They are old tsarist officers, intelligentsia, priests. The socialist-revolutionaries lead them. It was they who prepared the uprising and organized the bandit gangs.<sup>12</sup>

Things were bad, as we can see. What self-respecting peasant would want to wind up companion to intelligentsia, officers, and scoundrels, especially under the leadership of socialist-revolutionaries? Strange as it may seem . . . The same author, Vladimir Dokukin, offers an excerpt from a resolution passed at a conference of independent peasants of Tambov and Lebediansk counties, written, doubtless, by a Bolshevik.

Some of the Tambov peasants have surrendered to bourgeois deceit . . . Soviet institutions are not working the way they

should. They are filled with muddle-headed workers and criminal hangers-on.<sup>13</sup>

We might ask, why are the criminals on one side (with the muddle-headed workers) better than the scoundrels and cutthroats of the other? Our own always smells better.

There are more hints about the character of the Soviet authorities' relations with the peasantry in the anthology Antonovshchina:

Those who suffered most were the peasants who were not associated with the SR bandits. They fell under the blows of the Reds and the Whites.

Frequent incidents of extreme repression from both sides were absolutely unavoidable.<sup>14</sup>

What have we got here? The Whites, or rather the Antonovtsy, we can understand. They had the nature of wolves, of SRs, of bandits. But the Reds?! Why were acts of extreme repression against peaceful peasants who had no relations with anyone absolutely unavoidable? Why should we think of the Reds as superior in this ugly business?

In truth, words can lead us astray, and not just the words of poets. . . Hail, comrades Evgenov, Litovskii, and Dokukin, who past the blinkers of the Party bias brought us these crumbs of truth. Future, more watchful, editors from the new intelligentsia, without quotation marks, removed the last hints of authenticity from written history.

The Kremlin was seriously alarmed by the large uprising in the very heart of Russia. At first, in the autumn of 1920, they thought they could handle it with central directives and local forces. A Plenipotentiary Commission of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee headed by Antonov-Ovseenko came to Tambov. They decided to pit two of theirs against the rebellious Antonov:

another Antonov was appointed chairman of the provincial Cheka. It did not help.

They had to take more serious measures. On February 10, 1921, a month before the 10th Party Congress and the cancellation of grain requisitioning throughout the country, it was abolished in Tambov, and all of the requisitioning squads were removed. Lenin received a delegation of Tambov peasants on February 14 and personally confirmed that decision. Still the uprising continued.

Such callous ingratitude called for stronger measures still. Special Tambov province units were created, subordinated directly to the commander-in-chief. At first they were commanded by P. A. Pavlov, then from May 1921 by Tukhachevskii with N. E. Kakurin as chief of staff. The Tambov peasants could not stand up to the relentless onslaught of regular troops.<sup>15</sup> There was nowhere they could get supplies, no one to support them. They were constantly called upon to surrender with the promise of complete amnesty. Unfortunately we do not have any information about how this promise was honored.

The death agony of the uprising began in 1921. Here are the official statistics. From May 28 to July 26, 5585 men turned themselves in voluntarily, 1260 with weapons, 4325 without; 5285 were seized in round-ups, 572 armed, and 4713 unarmed; 985 others were captured; and 4555 were killed in fighting. Altogether in these two months: 16,370. Together with deserters (7646) and those who had turned themselves in voluntarily before May 28 (12,903), the losses of the rebellious forces numbered 36,919. The large number of rebels who were taken unarmed seems to suggest that as a group they were not heavily armed.

Remnants of the rebel bands resisted longer, until the end of 1922. On June 22, 1922 Aleksandr Antonov and his brother Dmitrii were surrounded in the remote village of Nizhnii Shibriai in Borisoglebsk county by a detachment of two Chekists and six former rebels under M. Pokaliukhin. They were killed in an exchange of gunfire.

The Tambov uprising was not an isolated or exceptional episode. During 1921 and 1922 the Red Army was kept busy in the "little" civil war against the muzhiks. Here is a list of the names of the SR-kulak (read peasant) uprisings for that period, which are given in official historiography:

Surgutskii	Cirotskii (Kaigorodovs' gang)
Zaural'skii (Kurgan)	Ukrainskii (Makhno)
Irkutskii	Ekaterinburgskii
Ishimsko-Petropavlovskii	Severo-Kavkazskii
Vitebskii	Zavolzhskii (Sapozhkov)
Vernenskii (Kazakhstan)	Karel'skii
Iaroslavskii	Bashkirskii
Kostromskoi	



PART TWO

THOSE TURBULENT YEARS

"So we might as well try setting sail.  
Huge and clumsy creaks the turning  
weal."

Osip Mandelshtam  
in "50 Poems" translated by  
Bernard Mears. Persea Books NY  
c. trans. by B. M.





## Chapter 9

### The Party: Battle of the Lines, or the Fight for Portfolios

All our political history from the illness and death of Lenin to the expropriation of the peasantry can be seen as a series of battles between Stalin and other leaders of the Russian Communist Party. Each of them brought him closer to complete sovereignty in the Party.

In support of this point of view we can offer the following approximate periodization for the 20s:

1923-1924. Stalin in a bloc with Zinov'ev and Kamenev against Trotskii. The secret deal with Bukharin and his group. Appointment of Rykov as Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, and of Frunze as Assistant Chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council of the USSR.

1925. Replacement of Trotskii by Frunze. The defeat of Zinov'ev and Kamenev. Liquidation of Frunze. Appointment of Voroshilov People's Commissar of the Navy and Chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council.

1926. Struggle with the united Trotskyite-Zinov'evite opposition. The death of Dzerzhinskii.

1927. The complete defeat of Zinov'ev, Kamenev, Trotskii, and their supporters. Departure of Tukhachevskii from the Headquarters of the RKKA. Pogrom at Gosplan, the massive slaughter of engineers. Industrialization. Beginning of the campaign against the "Right".

1929. Political liquidation of Bukharin, Rykov, Tomskii. Collectivization. Voroshilov's article "Stalin and the Red Army."

Stalin showed himself to be an exceptional political strategist in those years. He employed his talent in behind-the-scenes machinations, intrigues, conspiracies, and provocations. Stalin preferred indirect action, at which he

was an intuitive master. His favorite device was to demoralize his enemies so that when he actually struck, they were already significantly weakened. Stalin's rivals almost always disagreed with one another and were unable to act decisively. He artfully manipulated their discord to set them against one another. At the right moment he isolated the most dangerous, allied himself with the others, and removed the one.

In 1923-24 Stalin was able to use Zinov'ev and Kamenev to deliver several crushing blows to Trotskii, from which he never did recover. Remaining in the shadows, he removed from his path to power a politician whose name from the moment of the October revolution was invariably associated with Lenin's and who seemed to the majority of the population Lenin's rightful successor. Trotskii and other prominent men, who were independent in their views but were branded with the convenient common epithet Trotskyite, did not strive primarily to gain personal power, but to overcome a tendency they feared might destroy the revolution: domination by the party apparatus and a rebirth of bureaucratism. Zinov'ev and Kamenev were so frightened of Trotskii's apparent Napoleonic pretensions of which Stalin had warned them, that in the heat of battle they did not notice the weakening of their own positions. Kamenev, Stalin's friend and his recent protector, did not become head of the government in January 1924. He had performed that function for more than a year during Lenin's illness and was the primary candidate for the position. The ostensible reason was that because of the prejudice of the peasant masses, it would be politically harmful to have a Jew at the head of the government. The question of whether it would be useful to have a Georgian as the General Secretary of the Party seems not to have been raised. A. I. Rykov became the chairman of the Council of People's Commissars. Kamenev had to be satisfied with the portfolio of Chairman of the Council of Labor and Defense. Lenin had

filled that post, too. Now the two posts were separated to give Kamenev a little something to sweeten the pill.

Rykov was part of a new, and for the time being secret, group of allies of Stalin. Bukharin and Tomskii were also. It is likely that the chief attraction of these new friends for Stalin was their purely Russian heritage, which contrasted very usefully with the Jewish domination of the Party's hierarchy, especially in the circles of Zinov'ev, Kamenev, and Trotskii. Bukharin got to work zealously and attacked Trotskii with praiseworthy diligence. Not long before, at the 10th Congress, he had aligned himself with Trotskii on the question of trade unions.

In 1925 Zinov'ev and Kamenev felt Stalin's hand and hurried to put together their own faction based in Leningrad. But they were too late. At the 14th Congress Stalin dealt them a severe blow. Bukharin's group and Stalin's faceless proteges, who now made up a majority of the party, attacked them savagely. Trotskii, already beaten and humiliated, chose not to interfere.

It would be a mistake to see Stalin's victory at the Congress as a result of behind-the-scenes maneuvering only. It was not that simple. The very openness of the struggle was its hallmark. The personal quarrels of the leaders surfaced publicly for the first time at the 14th Congress. Previously there had occurred bitter conflicts of opinions, platforms, and positions, but never before had there been talk about organized repression of individuals - especially of the top leaders. In the first years of the revolution Kamenev, Zinov'ev, Bukharin, Nogin, and many others, had broken with Lenin over basic questions of policy, had resigned from the post they held and had announced their departure from the Central Committee. But each time the problem had been worked out bloodlessly.

This was how Lenin conceived Party structure. Already at the turn of the century he saw the Party as a centralized organization welded together by iron discipline and headed by a stable, that is irremovable, collective leadership. In this way he hoped to secure the continuity of policy and inviolability of basic ideology.

Lenin's collective included Sverdlov, who died in 1919, Kamenev, Zinov'ev, Stalin, Trotskii, Bukharin, Dzerzhinskii, Kalinin, and a number of others. It was assumed that these comrades would run the Party and state. Disagreements on individual questions became public only with the permission of the Central Committee; and after a decision was reached, all would submit to it.<sup>1</sup> However bitter the verbal battles became, the blood of the minority was never demanded.

That is the way things went until Lenin's illness knocked him from the saddle. Enmity immediately flared up among his colleagues. We can say it another way: they discovered they could not work together collectively. It all began with the conspiracy against Trotskii. Zinov'ev advanced the cunning plan, which was discussed by a narrow circle of conspirators in a grotto near Kislovodsk ("the cave meetings"). To strengthen the leadership during Lenin's illness, he proposed to replace the Politbiuro with a "politicized" Secretariat composed of Zinov'ev, Stalin, and Trotskii. Kamenev would remain head of the Council of People's Commissars and the Council of Trade and Defense. That combination would make Trotskii a permanent minority; he would not be able to form blocs on various issues as he had done in the Politbiuro. But the plan was shelved . . . by Stalin, who had extremely unfriendly relations with Trotskii, but who up to this time took care to clothe his animosity in official resolutions. He spoke about this in 1925:

In 1923 after the 12th Congress the men who gathered in the "Cave" [laughter] worked out the platform about the destruction of the Politbiuro and the politicization of the Secretariat, that is about turning the Secretariat into the leading political organization organ run by Zinov'ev, Trotskii, and Stalin. What was the idea of that platform? What did it mean? It meant running the Party without Rykov, Kalinin, Tomskii, Molotov, and Bukharin. Nothing came of the platform and not only because it was unprincipled, but because without those comrades I have mentioned it was not possible to run the Party. To the question posed me in writing from the bowels of Kislovodsk, I answered in the negative, announcing that if the comrades insisted, I was ready to leave the place quietly, without discussions, open or secret, and without demanding guarantees of the rights of the minority [laughter].

Stalin for understandable reasons did not want to make public all the inner secrets of the Central Committee. He did not expose his personal motives in that affair. He evidently sensed immediately that he himself might turn out to be in the minority if the wind shifted. In any case, Stalin appeared to outsiders to be the preserver of party solidarity and the enemy of intrigue.

After Lenin's death late in 1924 Zinov'ev and Kamenev thought of an easier way to get rid of Trotskii. Again Stalin's words:

The Leningrad provincial committee passed a resolution to expel comrade Trotskii from the Party. We, that is the majority of the Central Committee, did not agree with that

[Voices: "Right!"]. We had something of a fight with the Leningraders and convinced them to eliminate the point about exclusion from their resolution. A little while later when we had a meeting of the plenum of the Central Committee, the Leningraders and comrade Kamenev demanded the immediate exclusion of comrade Trotskii from the Politbiuro. We disagreed with that proposal, won a majority in the Central Committee, and limited ourselves to removing comrade Trotskii from his post as People's Commissar of War.<sup>2</sup>

Immediately Stalin made a statement staggering for its candor and sagacity:

We did not agree with comrades Zinov'ev and Kamenev because we knew that the policy of expulsion was fraught with serious dangers for the Party, that the method of expulsion, the method of letting blood - and they were demanding blood - was dangerous, infectious: today we cut one off, tomorrow another, the day after that a third. What would be left of the Party? [Applause.]<sup>3</sup>

It hardly matters what Stalin thought then when he objected to expulsion. What is more important is that he claimed to stand for unity and for the inviolability of the Leninist leadership, while his opponents preached a pogrom. This position made him more popular with the leadership and the rank and file of the Party; his authority grew enormously.

In the second half of 1925 Zinov'ev and Kamenev split with the majority of the Central Committee, which was headed by Stalin, over the formulation of the general political line. Zinov'ev and Kamenev suggested a contradictory and psychologically unacceptable course: on the one hand to put the squeeze on capitalistic elements, that is to continue the civil war in peacetime; and on

the other hand to admit that socialism could not be built in Russia until the world revolution had come. Bukharin protested there was no reason to start a war, that it would do them no good now they were in power; he insisted also that it would be foolish to touch the peasants - they were supplying grain for now, and later they would grow into socialism. Stalin said, "We have had our socialist revolution, now let's build socialism. If there should be a world revolution, wonderful; if not, we will get along without it. We can't just mark time waiting for it; no one knows when it might come." Without going into the essence of the argument, it is enough to note that Stalin's position looked more logical and attractive.

On the eve of the Congress Zinov'ev decided to strike through his Leningrad oprichnina<sup>4</sup> at Bukharin and took aim at his slogan "Get rich". (Stalin at that time apparently accepted that idea if not the formulation of it.) At the Congress, where they were in a clear minority (only the Leningrad delegation), the inseparable pair put on a noisy demonstration. Zinov'ev delivered an extremely long supplementary report in which he said nothing except that socialism in one country was impossible. Kamenev, supported by Sokol'nikov, openly demanded a shake-up of the organs of the central committee and the removal of Stalin from his post as General Secretary.

Stalin, having made himself part of the overwhelming majority, limited himself to discrediting his opponents as unprincipled intriguers and bad Leninists, but he did not demand their blood: both of them remained on the Politbiuro.

Zinov'ev and Kamenev miscalculated badly. Striving for absolute power, they planned to use Stalin, the hard-working but rather dull organizer, to push Trotskii aside and trample the rest. On the way to this goal they

encroached upon the organizational bases of the Party. They did not achieve what they were after, but they did clear Stalin's path to personal dominion.

It is very likely that Stalin had dreamt of personal dictatorship before this but did not know how to go about getting it. Not having a glorious past of indisputable authority, the cautious mountainman did not want to take a premature risk. If he had grabbed for power soon after Lenin's death and failed, his removal would have caused little stir. Most people thought of him then only as a minor figure in the Central Committee, like Krestinskii or Molotov. (In January 1925 he put his enemies to a test. He offered his resignation, which they refused.) At the 14th Congress he gained enormous political capital at one stroke. Besides that the means by which he would reach power, the method of removal, was put on the agenda. The taboo against consuming the flesh of the leaders had not been lifted, but their halos had been tarnished. The careless acts of the next opposition strengthened Stalin even more.

By 1926 Zinov'ev and his group realized their position was shaky and hurried to ally with their recent victims, first of all with Trotskii. But the leaders of this new bloc had already lost their key positions. In the eyes of the rank and file Party members, whose numbers had sharply increased after Lenin's draft of 1924, they appeared to be schismatics who had set themselves against the Party line and were now trying to regain their lost influence. Only the older Party intellectuals from before the Revolution were able to differentiate shades of opinion and regularly allowed themselves to make their own judgements. The dispute had made no sense to most people; the common explanation for it was the "fight for portfolios". In these circumstances the new Party members preferred to vote the way the local apparatchiki told them to, and for them the Central Committee Secretariat,



which was firmly controlled by Stalin, was as holy and sinless as the Pope in Rome. The Secretariat issued directives and orders, usually orally and always secretly, which very arbitrarily interrupted decisions of congresses and plenums to the advantage of Stalin's group. The opposition had no way to get their point of view to the local Party organizations. Their difficulties were greatest just before a congress or a conference. Any attempt to address the Party directly qualified as an illegal act, a violation of the rules. To give the opposition the rostrum at a congress did not have much meaning. They had to address a selected and hostile audience. By the time of the next congress the form of disagreement had changed, and all had to begin again.

The new "united" opposition was unable to present a coherent program. In the past Trotskii and Zinov'ev had rarely held the same opinion. By character and by conviction they were exact opposites. Trotskii was by temperament revolutionary; he was decisive and adventuresome. Zinov'ev, having spent many years as Lenin's literary secretary, was a tedious theoretician, an intriguer, and a coward. In October Trotskii had been the soul of the uprising<sup>5</sup> (Lenin was its head); fearing historical responsibility, Zinov'ev and Kamenev had deserted.

For the sake of unity the faction had to pile rather contradictory views into one eclectic heap. From the Trotskyites came the slogan about the struggle with bureaucratization and a Thermidorean reaction in the Party, and also superindustrialization at the expense of the peasants. From the Zinov'ites came the thesis about the impossibility of building socialism without help in the form of a world revolution. (The question arises, why hurry with the development of industry if we will nonetheless not be able to attain socialism on our own?) The opposition's hastily rigged program,

together with their tactical impotence and organizational weakness, foreordained their defeat.

In 1926 Stalinists and other officials hostile in one way or another to the opposition held all the most important posts. The General Secretary of the Party was Stalin himself; Ordzhonikidze was chairman of the Central Control Commission; Rykov was chairman of the Council of People's Commissars; Bukharin was editor of Pravda; Tomskii was head of the Unions; Dzerzhinskii was head of OGPU, NKVD, and the VSNKh. While he was not a strong supporter of Stalin, Dzerzhinskii was an irreconcilable enemy of Zinov'ev and Kamenev. In July 1926 he dropped dead at a meeting of the Central Committee, where he had spoken twice on secondary issues, polemicizing violently with Zinov'ev and Piatakov, his assistant at VSNKh. His death greatly benefited Stalin. Iron Feliks had the reputation of a fervent and incorruptable fanatic, merciless to any enemy of the Party and socialism. Whether he actually was or not is hard to say, but he had the reputation. However that may be, Stalin could consider himself lost if Dzerzhinskii had suspected him of improper activities or intentions. And there was something to fear. Only very recently Frunze had died a very messy death. The head of the punitive organs left the scene at a very opportune time. We will have another occasion to speak of this affair.

The opposition appeared at that time to be in a much less imposing position. Trotskii was chairman of the Concessions Committee.<sup>6</sup> Kamenev - People's Commissar of Trade. Zinov'ev after his removal from the Executive Committee of the Comintern was apparently nothing at all. The fact that they remained members of the Central Committee and the Politbiuro only weakened them further. According to Party rules, members of the Politbiuro did not have the right to speak publicly without the agreement of that body, and

Stalin had the majority in it. Besides that Bukharin stood in their way to access to the Party press. The game was played mostly at one end of the field.

When the opposition lost patience and decided to ignore the rules, they publicized their platform and even risked forming their own procession at the tenth anniversary celebration of October. But these were more than gestures done for effect. It was as if Stalin had been waiting for something like that. An organized purge began even before the Congress. On November 14, 1927 a Joint Plenum of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission resolved to expel Trotskii and Zinov'ev from the Party. Kamenev for the time being remained. It was all done by Party rules. This was the first application of the seventh point of the resolution "On Party Unity", which provoked such argument and doubts at the 10th Congress.<sup>7</sup>

A little more than a month later, at the 15th Congress, the Stalin-Bukharin coalition achieved the destruction of their enemy. Trotskii and Zinov'ev's appeal to this lofty gathering availed them nothing. They were trying to close the barn door after the horse had escaped. The delegates had been carefully selected and thoroughly instructed. This was the last Congress at which the opposition was permitted to express their views. It was a sad spectacle: one after another the few opposition speakers were driven from the rostrum by the hoots of a well rehearsed clique. Only Kamenev persevered to complete his speech despite the diabolic noise.

The game of inner-Party democracy came to an end. A decision was made to drive all the opposition from the Party en masse and to permit applications for readmission to be heard on an individual basis by the Central Committee, not the Congress. Part of the opposition, including its leaders, immediately surrendered and submitted a penitent statement to the Congress, but a fresh indignity awaited them. Their capitulation was refused, and the whole

question was turned over to the Central Committee.<sup>8</sup> Trotskii was exiled to Vernyi (now Alma-Ata) and in 1929 was thrown out of the country. Hundreds of lesser Trotskyites went into Siberian exile. These were the first repressions by the Bolsheviks against members of their own Party.

Stalin was far from drunk with success. The victory was total but not final. There were groups left in the Party by whom he was recognized as leader and the instrument of the will of the majority, but not the God-given Great Leader. There were many such comrades, but with each passing month they were spread more thinly among the faceless mass of new recruits, the time-serving and self-serving people who flooded into the ruling Party. Yet these seemingly independent older members enjoyed popularity and influence among the masses because of their earlier activities, the years in the underground, the revolution, the civil war, and their literary fame. The time had not come to muzzle them all, so Stalin decided to strike at the more notable of them near the center of power. Politbiuro members Bukharin, Rykov, Tomskii, the leader of the Moscow Party organization Uglanov, and others associated with them were worthy objects of attack. They continued to believe in their own importance and to attempt to guide theory and practical affairs in their own way. Stalin had long perceived their defenselessness; moreover, he was indebted to many of them for their services in the battle with Trotskii and Zinov'ev. The General Secretary did not like to feel obligated; he much preferred to pick the moment to repay his creditors. Finally, they were widely popular and deflected to themselves part of the people's attention and love, which by rights belonged to Stalin alone.

In 1928-1929 Stalin suddenly redirected his fire. While he was attempting to rid himself of the opposition, he had followed Bukharin's ideological lead, advocating civil peace and the opening of social and economic opportunities

for the rural producers, that is, for the kulaks. But once the Zinov'evites had been kicked out of the vanguard along with Trotskii, Stalin made a sharp turn to the left, much sharper than Zinov'ev and Kamenev had wanted, and more decisively than Lev Davidovich himself would have done. At this sharp turn the Bukharinites skidded into the ditch; they were now called the Right. This was an even more impressive victory for Stalin, even if it was not so sensational. Bukharin, who stood for the peaceful development of socialism for all the peasantry, had a very wide following.

It could not have been otherwise in the land of the muzhik. The rural people craved a life of peace and plenty, whatever scholarly theoreticians might call it. Bukharin, however, disappointed the hopes and expectations of his simple supporters. When under the guise of collectivization Stalin declared the crusade against the muzhik, they put up an abstract, theoretical opposition, but they did not engage him openly. At the 16th Congress in 1930 they offered the white flag: Rykov, Tomskii, and Uglanov confessed to errors they had not committed; Bukharin, pleading illness, did not appear at all. The Bukharinites' betrayal of other Party leaders came back to haunt them; they did not keep their hold on power.

It did not matter that Bukharin and Stalin were personal friends, that they visited one another at home and shared a dacha. In Party matters Iosif Vissarionovich was able to put sentiment behind him. True, in destroying the Right, he long refrained from extreme measures. They were only expelled from the Politbiuro and driven from the commanding heights. They remained members of the Central Committee and received lesser posts. It is possible that personal feelings played a certain role in this. When he battered his friends, Stalin did not work to the limit of his strength, although in his own

way he kept his purposes in mind. He had to remember that Bukharchik was the darling of the Party.

Stalin would not have been Stalin had he given himself entirely to the fight with these pitiful opponents, either real or fancied. Comrade Stalin had studied Lenin well, he had certainly read Engels, and he knew something of Marx. He had assimilated what was most important, and that was that at the base of political power lay the mastery of the economy and of productive relations. And it was precisely in the economic area that things were not going well. The nationalized industry was barely functioning; the country was experiencing a goods shortage. The peasantry carried on with its backward small-scale agriculture. They might at any time decide to withhold grain, and then the country would experience a real famine. True, the muzhiks were for the time being turning over their produce, but they were grumbling that there was nothing for them in the stores. Stalin, who had just yesterday declared the building of socialism in one country, in bast-sandal Russia, preferred satisfaction and universal gratitude to grumbling. He looked about for the means to his ends, and they immediately turned up.

This breadth of views was characteristic of Stalin. He did not hesitate to use a useful idea or a slogan only because it had originated with others. He selected what he could use, and when the time was right, he put it into action.

When the Trotskyites, fervid revolutionaries and impatient visionaries that they were, called for the accelerated development of industry (super-industrialization), and for harnessing the peasantry to achieve it (it looked a lot like robbery), Stalin, it would seem, opposed them. He unleashed upon them a pack of circumspect theoreticians headed by Bukharin, who were protective and indulgent in regard to the muzhik. Bukharin was considered an

economist in the Party - not the sort, God forbid, who busied himself with the vulgar economy, but who knew all about surplus value and the inescapable failure of world capitalism. In his leisure hours he liked to think about the village and dreamed up the slogan "Get rich!" to advocate the peaceful integration of the kulak into socialism. The peasantry found this a satisfying contrast to the demands of the Trotskyites, those kikes and muzhik eaters. (Stalin never supported the slogan in public, and when the tactical necessity for it faded, he required Bukharin to renounce it. That was in 1925-1926.) Stalin fought against the Trotskyites' ideas, but being a thrifty person, he filed them in his memory in case they should later prove useful. Although he could not accept these ideas directly from the hands of sworn enemies, he recognized the advantages of a cavalry approach to the economy, which paved the way for brutal centralization and the complete destruction of independent economic units.

Trotskyism had hardly ceased to be a real force when Stalin began to use its slogans. He only slightly altered the phraseology (the five-year plan, collectivization) and neglected to cite his sources. Instantly the good-humored Bukharin and his comrades became Right deviationists and supporters of the kulaks.

From a safe distance, in exile abroad, Trotskii tried to defend his priority. He asserted that the idea to force all the peasants into collective farms belonged to him and his supporters. Stalin laughed. In the first place, for Marxists it is axiomatic that the role of the individual in history must not be exaggerated, especially of such individuals as Trotskii. Secondly, what was important was the building of socialism. Quarrels about who said what first and who did not were minor. In the third place all the circumstances of the moment must be taken into consideration. To propose a

slogan prematurely was to run ahead of the masses, to alienate oneself from the masses as an ultra-leftist. Fourthly, and finally, if one were to ask those same masses, the workers, the collective farmers, they would tell it straight: it was Stalin's plan for collectivization, Stalin's five-years plan. That's how it was with industrialization, the collectivization of agriculture, and the pretenses of Mr. Trotskii.

Stalin did not only borrow. His creative faculties were also wide awake. In 1928 he apparently devised the thesis "the cadres decide all", and, keeping it to himself, decided to start by destroying the old engineer cadres. That year a zealous investigator from the town of Shakhty in Rostov province concocted a charge of sabotage against a group of mining specialists. R. Menzhinskii, the chairman of OGPU, saw the charges as provocation and threatened the investigator with a tribunal if he did not present real evidence of guilt. Stalin, on the other hand, saw the possibilities of the case, latched onto it, and gave it national importance. Trials like that, trumped up for show, enabled him to create and sustain an atmosphere of uncertainty, suspicion, and fear in the country, and greatly facilitated his rule. With the Russian aptitude for muddling and bungling, it was easy to pin charges of sabotage or wrecking on any worker or group. Victims for repression could be found at will. The Shakhty case helped develop the methods, the technology of the sort of trial which proved so useful in the future.

The trial was successful. True, at first Menzhinskii opposed him, but Stalin defeated him in the Politbiuro<sup>9</sup> and made him toe the line. In the future the punitive organs did what they were told, and even displayed some initiative. . .



The nascent personal dictatorship had found a suitable weapon. Stalin hurried to try out the relatively untested method on a larger scale. He struck at the technological intelligentsia.

It is worth pausing a moment at this point. In its essence Stalin's dictatorship was not only personal, for he already had behind him the Party bureaucracy, which was composed of old Bolshevik backbenchers and newcomer Party careerists. The dilution of the revolutionary party began immediately after October. In the early 1920s it assumed threatening proportions. Merciless purges did not solve the problem. It was a labor of Sisyphus: the careerists and thieves were replaced by others, more numerous and more insistent. The monopoly on political power had an ugly reverse side. All the unscrupulous people, who in different circumstances would have been spread among many parties, flocked to the Bolsheviks.<sup>10</sup>

The new people, like all nouveaux riches and parvenus in history, were insolent, impatient, and unscrupulous. They joined the ruling party to rule and to get their hunk of the state pie; they did not care about implementing Marx's outline from "Critique of the Gotha Program" or in accordance with "Anti-Duhring" to make the leap from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom; certainly they did not join in order to enjoy philosophical and political-economic discussions. It must be acknowledged that they did have to learn a certain amount of the dogma from the Party catechism, but they viewed that as an "entry fee", an unavoidable evil. In the mid-twenties two groups stood in their way to power: the Party intelligentsia with their laurels of service to the revolution, Marxist erudition, powerful pens, and ability to speak to the masses; and the technological intelligentsia, without whom, or so thought the first Soviet leaders, it would be impossible to advance economically and culturally. The newly converted communists looked upon the

intellectuals with hostility: organic, since they mostly came from the same middle class; and social, as privileged competitors.

Stalin had long ago perceived that force and understood that the future belonged to it. It was to them he addressed his sermons in which the most complex problems were reduced to absurdity and, in his seminarist's way, were summed up in questions and answers. The bureaucratic mass quickly came to value Stalin. They were bought by the clarity (which was more truly primitiveness) of his speeches, which contained no scholarly flourishes or painful contradictions. Most important, he always set them against the very things and people they themselves despised. First the oppositionists, who spoke unintelligibly cleverly, who kept the simple people from making their way, and who were practically all Jews anyway. (About that, it is true, no one spoke openly, but like it or not, the thought came to mind as one looked at those noses, those bulging eyes, that curly hair.) Then the specialists, who treated the newcomers so condescendingly, who strutted their knowledge and culture, and who in any case came from the class of former exploiters. (Questions like that it was all right to discuss.) By his intellectual development and his education Stalin was the same sort of superficial, half-educated person as this new generation of time-servers. He spouted the same prejudices.

When Stalin invented wrecking and generously shared his discovery with the rank and file of the Party, they were more than grateful. They understood: Stalin was the messiah of the new religion, the new living god and commander they had wanted since Lenin had died. The process by which Stalin and the Party-bureaucrats found one another is fascinating, and it still awaits its researchers.

Hesitation, confusion, and disorientation were all unavoidable in the struggle with the oppositionists. Many of the young members of the Party were awed by their names and reputations: Trotskii, the great leader of the Red Army; Zinov'ev, head of Comintern; etc. On the other hand, with the specialists everything was clear and easy. As A. Belinkov has correctly noted, the relations between the intelligentsia and the revolution, that is Soviet authority, were no longer open to question.<sup>11</sup>

The destruction of the old engineering cadres was carried out quickly and without loss by the attackers. Some of the specialists were executed; others were imprisoned for obstinacy, to be used later in the projects of the five-year plan and to meet quotas. The rest went into hiding and no longer dared to contradict any of the plans of the leadership. In 1937 they would be forced to publicly lick the boots of the NKVD, but that is another story, which will be told in its own place.

One of the most glaring examples was the pogrom of the experts - the Menshevik economists and the banking and industrial big-wigs at Gosplan and VSNKh. Now all of the conditions were in place for the first Stalinist five-year plan, for truly Stalinist, that is purely paper, planning. Entirely unreachable goals were written into the plans, and nonetheless the five-year plan was fulfilled in four years. Now Kuibyshev and Ordzhonikidze could furrow their brows and toss about billions of rubles and millions of tons of steel, and there was no one to think to refer them to Malinin and Burinin's Arithmetic.<sup>12</sup>

These were the circumstances in which Voroshilov's article "Stalin and the Red Army" appeared.<sup>13</sup>



## Chapter 10

### The Trojan Horse and the Cavalryman

From the beginning of the 1920s serious changes occurred in the status of the Red Army. Maintaining a force of five million men became more of a burden than the Republic could bear. But demobilization was complicated by two factors: fear of disarming too soon, and the effort of the government to follow the letter of Party ideology. Red Armymen released from service were not permitted to go straight home: they were formed into labor armies, according to Marx's recipe, to resuscitate the economy. In fact they became forced laborers. This undertaking proved fruitless, and after only a few months it was abandoned. In 1922 and 1923 the the army shrank precipitously - to 500,000.

Even after that, however, the character of the army contradicted Marxist doctrine. The founders, and Lenin after them, considered a regular army an instrument of oppression and a major element in the plundering of a nation's wealth. A militia, the people armed on the example of Switerland, was considered ideal. The workers could be given military training without being taken them from productive work; in a time of danger they would rise to defend the homeland. Real service in peacetime was excluded or permitted only for short periods of training.

It is interesting to note Lenin's views on the army. In 1903, in "On village poverty" he wrote:

A standing army is not needed to defend the state from attack; a people's militia is sufficient for that. If every citizen of the state is armed, no enemy can frighten Russia. And the people would be free of the burden of

militarism: hundreds of millions of rubles a year are spent on militarism. Taxes are raised so high to support it that it becomes harder and harder to live. Militarism strengthens the power of the police and bureaucrats over the people.

In 1905 in "The Army and Revolution" Lenin wrote that it was necessary to destroy the standing army and replace it by arming all the people.

A standing army, everywhere, in all countries, serves not so much against external as against internal enemies. Standing armies have everywhere become weapons of reaction . . . the executioner of people's freedom . . . We will utterly destroy the standing army . . . No force on earth will dare invade free Russia if the armed people, having destroyed the military caste, are the bulwark of freedom.<sup>2</sup>

At the height of the imperialist war he maintained this position.

The contemporary national army remains a weapon in the hands of certain individuals, families, classes ... The army of the democratic collective of socialist society is nothing more than the armed people, since it consists of highly cultured people, freely working in collective shops and participating fully in all areas of the life of the state.<sup>3</sup>

On the eve of the February Revolution he wrote, "The Social Democrats want to destroy all armies . . . after the victorious socialist revolution."<sup>4</sup>

After the fall of the autocracy he recalled, "The first decree of the Commune was the abolition of the standing army."<sup>5</sup>

If you were to show these quotations to a Soviet general today without naming the author, at best he would laugh. But even at the dawn of Soviet

power this noble scheme could not have been realized. The Red Army was formed at first as a voluntary force, but very soon regular military units were being organized by compulsory conscription. After the civil war ended, one more attempt was made to operate according to the Party program. That was the famous military reform of 1923-1925. Its authors, particularly Frunze, worked out a compromise. The Red Army was given a dual structure: regular units coexisted in it with territorial units that were more like a militia. However, this was only a formal concession to ideology. They took as their model the scheme employed by Field Marshal D. Miliutin in 1864-1874.<sup>6</sup> They also borrowed Arakcheev's idea for military settlements in the border armies.<sup>8</sup> (They liquidated the settlements in the Ukraine quickly because of the Chuguevsk uprising of 1922, but they existed in the Far East until the end of the thirties.)

We will describe Frunze's reforms only very briefly. We refer readers interested in greater detail to I. Berkhin's very thorough study.<sup>8</sup> From 1921 to 1925 the army was reduced from 5,300,000 to 562,000 men. Military service became compulsory. Of the 77 infantry divisions existing in 1925, only 31, fewer than half, were regular army. Militia units were assigned the task of giving the population a general military education in peacetime. They were also required to supply thirty divisions for the first weeks of war, while mobilization was being carried out. From the very beginning the Bolsheviks were apprehensive about giving weapons to the people. Berkhin complains that the territorial units were infected with "peasant" attitudes: demands were heard for the creation of a "farmers' union", which would defend the peasants' interests. Therefore the authorities bent their efforts in the twenties and thirties to increasing the strength and size of the regular army. The significance of the militias continuously waned; they were assigned

auxiliary functions (military education of the population, guarding military and industrial objects, etc.).

In the period we are describing the army, or more precisely its top leadership, was drawn into a maelstrom of political passions. The struggle centered on one of the most colorful and most controversial figures of the revolution, the head of the RKKA, Lev Trotskii. During the civil war the epithet "great leader and founder of the Red Army" affixed itself to Trotskii. Ironically, it may have been Stalin who devised the formula; in any case it appears in one of his articles from 1919.<sup>9</sup>

Trotskii can be characterized in a single word: he was a revolutionary. Revolution was the governing passion of his life. He quickly came to the fore during the revolution of 1905 when he became the real leader of the Petersburg Soviet. In the period between the revolutions, when the movement flagged, he tried to reconcile the feuding factions; he wrote on questions of literature and art; but he remained in surprising isolation, still not having found an outlet for his turbulent energy. Trotskii was an internationalist and a foe of the imperialist war, but he did not become, as Lenin did, a defeatist. The revolutionary upheaval in February 1917 brought him back to Russia. In the period immediately after February he did not join with the Bolshevik organization, but he did agree with them on the largest question of the revolution - the necessity of seizing power.

In the July days of 1917 Trotskii was exceptionally brave. At the entrance to the Tauride Palace he literally snatched Minister of Agriculture Chernov from the hands of sailors who were about to kill him. When the Provisional Government began its campaign against the Bolsheviks, Lenin and Zinov'ev on the orders of the Central Committee went into hiding. Trotskii, on the contrary, turned himself in voluntarily and demanded a public trial.



"I do not belong to the Bolshevik organization formally," he announced, "but I share their views, and I am prepared to share responsibility." Kerenskii's government held him for two months in Kresty Prison but was then forced to release him. By that time he was extraordinarily popular, especially among the soldiers, who were drawn by his enormous energy and exceptional oratorical talent. When the Bolsheviks gained a majority in the Petrograd Soviet, Trotskii became its chairman. This gave Lenin and the Bolsheviks the ideal platform from which to launch the revolution. Units of the Petrograd garrison would listen to no other organization. From then on Trotskii advanced hand in hand with Lenin in the debates about the immediate seizure of power. In these historic hours they did not have time to remember their earlier literary polemics in which Lenin had called Trotskii a "little Judas" and Trotskii had labeled Lenin the "exploiter of everything backward in the Russian workers' movement."<sup>10</sup> As long as Lenin had to remain in hiding, Trotskii was without a doubt the central figure in preparations for the October uprising. Even the moment of the convocation of the 2nd Congress of Soviets, which was timed to coincide with the revolution, was not arbitrarily set: October 25 was Trotskii's birthday.

In Lenin's first cabinet Trotskii received the portfolio of People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs. His activities in the diplomatic sphere were, however, brief and highly unsuccessful. Trotskii was not suited for machinations and intrigue. His position in the negotiations with the Germans - "neither peace, nor war" combined with an appeal to the world proletariat - received Lenin's support, but led to disaster. The Germans attacked, and the Soviets did not have the strength to oppose them. They were forced to submit to the "obscene" Brest peace.

Trotskii was transferred to the post of People's Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs, where he was truly in his element. His frenzied energy and his exceptional organizational abilities enabled him in a very short time to create the armed forces of the Soviet Republic, which saved it in the civil war. This was Trotskii's finest hour, when his personality unexpectedly blossomed. He saw himself as a doctrinaire Marxist, perhaps more orthodox than his spiritual fathers. But he had both a powerful mind and the ability - not always, it is true - to put common sense ahead of ideological prejudices.

Party catechism required the establishment of a militia-army, composed of the proletariat and the poorest peasantry, who would produce their own commander-revolutionaries on the field of battle. At first Lenin thought exactly along those lines. On November 24, 1918 he said,

Now, in building the new army, we must take our commanders only from the people. Only red officers will have authority among our soldiers and will be able to establish socialism in our army.<sup>11</sup>

Trotskii understood that this could lead only to guerrilla bands and defeat. They could be saved only by a regular army led by professionals. He boldly recruited unemployed officers of the tsarist army, who came to be called "military specialists". Half of the 300,000 man officer corps fought for the Reds. This solved another problem at the same time: if these officers had not been given the chance to serve the central authority in Moscow, most of them would have wound up fighting for the Whites.

The use of military specialists caused serious dissatisfaction in the Party. The doctrinaire theoreticians grumbled. The army's communists wailed heart-rendingly; they did not want to carry out the orders of class enemies. But Trotskii, supported fully by the realist Lenin, stood by his guns and

won.<sup>12</sup> The highest positions of command in the Red Army, not to mention headquarters posts, were given to former imperial officers: both commanders-in-chief, Vatsetis and S. Kamenev; all front commanders with the exception of Frunze; all army commanders except Voroshilov, Sokol'nikov, and Budennyi. It was even truer of headquarters: former general P. Lebedev headed the Field Headquarters of the Revolutionary Military Council of Republic (RVSR). Even the staff of the First Horse Army, which was led by the specialist-baiters, Voroshilov and Budennyi, was manned by former officers.

Throughout the war Trotskii rushed about the fronts on his train inspiring enthusiasm and maintaining order with an iron hand. Everyone unreservedly recognized his decisive contribution to the victory of the Red Army - Lenin, Stalin, and many others. When the war ended, however, there was no suitable task for a man of his talents. A revolutionary has nothing to do in peace time. For a time his acute mind found an outlet in devising bold schemes - he proposed the idea of NEP a year before Lenin - but they were only episodes. Once again Party discipline began to stifle him. In 1922 from boredom he began to write a series of articles of literary criticism in which he first expressed the tenets of socialist realism.

Lenin's illness emphasized Trotskii's isolation. Hostilities found expression in office politics, intrigues, and alliances in which he did not wish, indeed was not able, to participate. In 1923 he spoke out against the Thermidorean reaction and the domination of the Party by apparatchiki. This was not a struggle for personal power as official historians try to present it. Quite the opposite, it was a protest against the real agony of the revolutionary spirit, against those who did seek a personal dictatorship - Zinov'ev, Stalin, Kamenev. Trotskii's denunciatory pathos evokes the style of the Jewish prophets. The incorrigible revolutionary damned his former

comrades-in-arms as soft, gentrified, and wrapped in red tape, but Trotskii cried in the wilderness. Only half a hundred well-known Party activists spoke out with him (the platform of the 46); only a few thousand shared his fears. The Party did not understand him. Trotskii could ignite a crowd for immediate revolutionary action, but he could not conspire, bend with the fashionable breezes, or win supporters with bribes, promises, or deceit. At the 13th Party conference he suffered total defeat.

It is not our purpose to compare the character of Stalin and Trotskii, and certainly not to idealize the latter. We mean only to describe Trotskii's role in founding the Red Army and the consequences of his removal from military leadership. In that context it is enough to note that both of these famous Bolshevik revolutionaries were proponents of extreme measures, but with an important difference. Trotskii represented a European radicalism that did not go beyond the bounds of civilization. Stalin was a concentrated expression of Asiatic brutality, which was crueler in him as it was mixed with limitless perfidy. Only contemporary Stalinists, deprived of the chance to deify their idol, are able to say that Trotskii, had he come to power, would have been as ruthless as the Great Leader of the People. It cannot be denied that Stalin consulted time and again the cook book of Trotskyism, but as Lenin said, his cuisine turned out unbearably spicy - and indigestible.

We have already said that the inviolability of Lenin's staff was breached first not by Stalin but by the black-comedy team of Zinov'ev and Kamenev. Trotskii always despised them for cowardice and panic-mongering. They in turn openly accused him of Bonapartism. There is a saying that real misfortune is born of unnecessary fears. These two by their intrigues against Trotskii untied Stalin's hands and brought about their own destruction.

The undermining of Trotskii began with the weakening of his position in the army. After the civil war the Secretariat of the Central Committee removed many of the political workers from the RKKA. In part this was a natural process connected with demobilization, but it was Trotskii's supporters who were first to be transferred. In 1923 the intrigues against the People's Commissar of the Army and Navy came out into the open. On June 2, a plenum of the Central Control Commission passed a resolution on the investigation of the activities of the military department (vedomstvo). A commission was formed under the chairmanship of V. V. Kuibyshev with N. M. Shvernik as his assistant; neither can be suspected of Trotskyite sympathies. In September S. I. Gusev became the head of the Commission. He had once been dismissed from the post of Chief of Political Administration of the RKKA by Trotskii.

The Stalinist-Zinovievite apparatus took aim at the leader of the Red Army and hemmed him in from all sides. On October 30 Zinov'ev's ally M. M. Lashevich and Stalin's creature K. E. Voroshilov were made members of the Revolutionary Military Council of the USSR; two years later they headed the supreme organ of defense. On January 12, 1924 A. S. Bubnov replaced V. A. Antonov-Ovseenko as chief of the Political Administration of the RKKA. Two days later a plenum of the Central Committee of the RKP(b) formed a commission to investigate the instability of the personnel and the condition of supplies in the armed forces. There is a provocative note in the way they phrased their task: it would not be difficult to find instability in an army that had just been reduced to one-tenth its former size. The commission was packed: Stalin and his people - Voroshilov, Egorov, Ordzhonikidze, Shvernik, Andreev; Bubnov, who had just been forced upon the War Commissariat; the insulted Gusev; Frunze, who aspired to Trotskii's position; also Unshlikht and

Sklianskii. From the first day of the existence of the RVSR, Sklianskii had been deputy chairman and had taken upon himself the whole burden of operational and chancellery work. Lenin regarded him highly and trusted him implicitly. He was included only for the sake of form, as he was intended to be the first victim.

The plenum met without Trotskii, who was seriously ill and had gone to the Caucasus to recover. The Central Committee's commission did not investigate the matter themselves, but worked only with material that was presented to it by Gusev. How easy it would have been to predict that the conclusions would go against Trotskii: he had neglected his work in the military department, and his assistants, E. M. Sklianskii and Chief of Staff P. P. Lebedev, had not provided competent leadership.

Lenin died on January 21, but the intrigues against Trotskii did not let up even in those tragic days. Stalin misinformed him about the date of Lenin's funeral, telling him it was a day or two earlier. The train on which Trotskii was then traveling from Tblisi to Sukhumi would not be able to make it to Moscow in time. (The train along the Caucasus shore then traveled the roundabout way through Baku.) It was officially announced that the Central Committee had prescribed that comrade Trotskii remain where he was for the sake of his health, which was so valuable to the revolution. Therefore, at the moment of the passing of power Trotskii was far from Moscow and remained away until April.

On February 2 the Central Executive Committee (TsIK) confirmed the composition of the new government headed by A. I. Rykov. Trotskii still kept his posts as People's Commissar of War and Chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council of the USSR. On the very next day, however, Gusev read to a meeting of the Central Committee, a report that was highly critical of the

military department's work and portrayed the Red Army as unfit. Unshlikht, Lashevich, Frunze, Voroshilov, and Ordzhonikidze supported Gusev; Tukhachevskii, Kashirin, and other military men had spoken in a similar way at previous commission meetings.

The general public was not aware of this behind-the-scenes maneuvering. Other songs were sung for show. The plenum of the Central Committee, which met March 31 - April 2, did not agree with the commission and completely approved the work of the military department. Even before that, however, Stalin and Zinov'ev had made further organizational changes. On March 21 Sklianskii was removed from the Revolutionary Military Council of the USSR.<sup>13</sup> Frunze was made first deputy Chairman, and Unshlikht the second.<sup>14</sup>

Frunze immediately concentrated enormous power in his hands. In April he was also appointed Chief of Staff of the RKKA, superintendent of all military academies, and commander of internal security forces. At the same time the position of commander-in-chief was eliminated. The point was obvious: to reduce Trotskii's influence in the military hierarchy to a minimum to be able to show later that he was not needed there at all.

To all appearances Zinov'ev was leading the beaters in this hunt. Stalin, who had much to gain by Trotskii's loss of power, did not interfere and remained in the shadows. By the time the 13th Party Congress opened in May, Trotskii had been eased out of military affairs. He was opposed by a monolithic majority formally grouped around Zinov'ev, who presented the Central Committee's political report. The report contained vicious attacks on Trotskii and Trotskism, although not a single word was said specifically about the army. Stalin emphasized statistics and inner-Party business in his organizational report. It drew very little criticism from the opposition. The General Secretary undoubtedly wanted to appear a businessman and

organizer, distant from the squabbles within the Party. The speakers who followed him helped him seem that way. Kamenev in a well constructed speech dissected Trotskiism bone by bone and branded it a petty bourgeois deviation. Bukharin, Uglanov, and Riutin continued angrily in the same vein. How were they to know that they would later be put up against the wall as Trotskii's accomplices ...

Trotskii defended himself weakly at the Congress. Either he had not fully recovered from his illness, or he understood the hopelessness of his situation. He came to attention and eloquently testified that one must not be right before the Party; one must share all with the Party including its mistakes and delusions.

As if he suddenly realized that he had been avoiding military matters, Zinov'ev addressed them briefly in his concluding remarks:

The reform carried out in the military . . . was devised at the initiative of the military men of the Central Committee with the full and enthusiastic support of the Central Committee, which discussed this extremely urgent reform many times in plenums and in the Politbiuro. The initiative belonged not so much to the military as to the Central Committee of the Party. We all believe that it has been properly carried out and that we will soon feel its results.

After his windy tirade with its veiled criticism of Trotskii, Zinov'ev mentioned in passing personnel changes in the defense hierarchy:

I think we were right to appoint a number of Central Committee men, headed by comrade Frunze, to the Revolutionary Military Council. They will help comrade



Trotskii carry on his work there and help the Revolutionary Council forge closer relations with the lower ranks of the Red Army.<sup>15</sup>

Frunze, who was a rather independent and popular figure, gravitated toward the Zinov'ev camp. In any case he had no intention "to help comrade Trotskii carry on his work." Rather he tried with all his might to displace him. He was well placed to try. Behind him stood the anti-Trotskii majority of the Central Committee; Frunze himself became a candidate member of the Politbiuro. When Trotskii opened debate again in the Party in 1924, he was defeated again. In the fall the Zinov'evites tried to show Trotskii the door, but Stalin prevented his ouster.<sup>16</sup>

Against the background of these repeated setbacks the retirement of the politically defeated Trotskii from the supreme military post seemed natural. On January 26, 1925 the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee approved the request of Trotskii, L. D. to be released from his duties as People's Commissar and Chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council and appointed Frunze in his place. Trotskii's removal had already been decided several days earlier at a plenum of the Central Committee for purely political reasons.

Frunze's elevation was accompanied by a small purge of the officer corps. On February 24, V. I. Shorin, who had recently been deputy commander-in-chief, was retired with a pension, deep gratitude, and the honor of remaining on the roles of the RKKA, for life (which did not save him from execution in 1937). The political motivation for his release shows through in the Revolutionary Military Council order - "retired because of the impossibility of further usefulness."<sup>17</sup>

By the beginning of 1925 the Stalin-Zinov'ev coalition had severed its primary rivalry ties with the military. But Stalin was more foresightful than

his temporary allies. He provoked them into speaking carelessly at Leningrad while he prepared another purge at the Congress. At the same time, but in deep secrecy, a more important act was in planning.

The army as a whole accepted Trotskii's retirement quietly, even with some relief. Their commissar was an arrogant man; he had loved the pose of the great leader. He was ill at ease in personal contacts with his subordinates and not infrequently injured their pride. He was unable to conceal his scorn for fools, which in Russia was at the very least dangerous. Frunze was a firm leader, but socially more graceful. In some eyes he was seen as a political overseer, but he also had a reputation as a military commander, the conqueror of Kolchak and Vrangeli. Only the Trotskiites were dissatisfied with the removal of their idol, but they could do little more than sing a hurried chorus of the song "After Trotskii, Frunze is such a shame, such a shame . . . ." The Army still did not suspect what awaited it . . .

While Stalin artfully maneuvered in the battle with Zinov'ev, planning to open the decisive campaign on the eve of the Congress in December, he maintained emphatically loyal relations with Frunze. More than that with the understandable aim of deflating memories of Trotskii, the Stalinists promoted Frunze, as the incomparable great leader of the Red Army. But Frunze was unable to make use of Stalin's sympathies: he was more drawn to Zinov'ev, and in any case he was not Stalin's type. Stalin permitted Frunze's promotion for two reasons. One was to weaken Trotskii; the second was to use the new People's Commissar as a Trojan horse under the cover of which he could put his own protege at the helm of the RKKA. The plan was rather subtle, but its realization, as was usual with Stalin, was rather rough.

To try to dismiss Frunze by legal means would have been inexpedient and difficult, therefore sudden death was chosen. In July 1925 Frunze was in two

automobile accidents. Voroshilov disclosed this in the press immediately after the commissar's death.<sup>18</sup> Since that method did not work, Stalin resorted to medical murder, possibly for the first time in his career.

Frunze suffered from stomach ulcers. In the summer of 1925, he took a course of medication at Mukholatka in the Crimea, which gave him considerable relief. He felt so much better that he went hunting. Subsequent events are not difficult to reconstruct from Voroshilov's article "The Memory of Our Dear Friend Mikhail Vasil'evich Frunze." Trying to deflect suspicion from himself and his crew, Frunze's successor employed too many details from which the sinister truth can be guessed.

Stalin, Voroshilov, and Shkitriatov, a confirmed Stalinist and one of the prominent figures of the 1937 terror, vacationed with Frunze. They repeatedly told the People's Commissar that his life was in danger and that resolute measures must be taken. With this excuse Voroshilov refused to go hunting with him. Frunze's personal physician, military doctor Mandryka, was sent away from the Crimea on some pretext and replaced by two doctors, Rozanov and Kasatkin, who were brought from Moscow with a large staff. They observed the patient for two weeks and under pressure from a concerned Stalin came to the conclusion that an operation was necessary.

On September 29 the whole group left for Moscow: the Stalinist trinity to the Central Committee plenum, Frunze to a hospital. Between October 7 and 10 Voroshilov and Bubnov visited him in the hospital and found him in good health. On one of those days they learned from a doctor Levin that seventeen prominent specialists were consulting on the case. Rozanov spoke in favor of the operation. Late that night Bubnov announced the doctors' unanimous decision - to operate. Everyone accepted it calmly.

What was there to be concerned about when Rozanov and Kasatkin persuaded us, assured us, that there was no reason for alarm. I believed. I believed as we all believed, as our unforgettable, best of the glorious, friend and comrade Mikhail Vasil'evidh calmly and confidently went under the knife.<sup>19</sup>

For understandable reasons Voroshilov eulogized the dead and winked a dirty wink toward medicine. As far as is known, none of the doctors was ever punished . . .

On October 31 upon his return from the Crimea, Voroshilov learned in a telegram from Stalin: "Frunze died today of a heart attack."<sup>20</sup>

Voroshilov lied. The Peoples Commissar did not go under the knife calmly, but with great reluctance. He expected to die and asked his friend I. Gamburg to see that he was buried at Ivanovo-Voznesensk. (He was not.) Frunze underwent the operation in obedience to a special decision of the Secretariat of the Central Committee, which relied on the conclusions of the medical experts. The latter was obtained in a rather straightforward way. The medics, who were not Party men, were told beforehand that marked improvement in the health of the patient was expected of them immediately. The question of the operation was decided by these means before the consultation. Nor is it certain that the decision was actually unanimous. What is certain is that when they did operate, the surgeons discovered that the operation was unnecessary - the ulcer had cicatrized. But by that time another problem had come up. They had difficulty putting the patient under anesthesia and gave him an overdose of chloroform. His heart could not stand it . . .

There is an oral tradition about the operation that gives a different picture. One of the consultants was seized by doubts about the expediency of

the operation on the evening of the day of the consultation. He expressed his doubts to Stalin's technical secretary in the Kremlin. The latter immediately informed his superiors, after which the professor was thanked and sent home in a Kremlin car. On Bol'shoi Kamennyi bridge - the old one which was lower than the one now standing - the car struck a railing and fell into the river. The driver managed to escape, but the unfortunate medic died.

The circumstances and atmosphere of that medical murder were used by B. Pil'niak in his "Story of the Unextinguished Moon."<sup>21</sup> Army Commander Gavrilov, having been cured of stomach ulcers, returns from a resort to Moscow, where he learns from the newspapers that he is to undergo an emergency operation. He goes to an important official, whom he finds writing a book on political economy. The latter informs him: you must, comrade Gavrilov, otherwise in a month you will be a corpse; your health is necessary for the revolution. For form's sake consultation is held with two Russian professors and a German. The latter categorically opposes the operation; so do the Russians, but they have no choice: they have read the papers. One of them says, as I understand it, they want only one decision from us - to operate. He will have to have it. One surgeon says to the other, I would not put my brother on the table in that condition. Gavrilov has a premonition about his death and writes a will, but he cannot violate revolutionary discipline. The operation discloses a well-healed ulcer, but the commander's heart stops under the influence of the anesthetic.

But the most damning evidence was given by Stalin himself. In a speech delivered at Frunze's open grave he outlined with characteristic brevity the destruction of the revolutionary cadres:

Comrades: I am in no condition to speak long, my heart does not let me . . .

This year has been cursed. It has taken from us many of our leading comrades. But even that was not enough, and there had to be still another sacrifice. Maybe that was actually necessary, that the old comrades so easily and simply slipped into the grave.<sup>22</sup>

The Party did not suffer any particularly important losses in 1925, but Stalin's nervous condition is explicable: this was his first experience of this sort, and the risk was great. Later it became easier. This pronouncement by the murderer is worthy of the attention of the author of Crime and Punishment . . .

That Stalin already had, if only in rough outline, a program to make his way to personal dictatorship is tangentially confirmed in his speech at Dzerzhinskii's funeral in July 1926. It begins with the words "After Frunze, Dzerzhinskii . . . "<sup>23</sup> It was as if Stalin were counting - for the time being the fingers on one hand were sufficient. And what if what Trotskii said in 1939 was true, that Stalin poisoned Lenin? Stalin said himself in 1924 that Il'ich had been given poison . . .<sup>24</sup>

Dzerzhinskii's death was certainly timely. The suspicious circumstances of Frunze's death had to sooner or later come under the scrutiny of the OGPU. Stalin might well have feared that iron Feliks, who was in the last stages of consumption, might show mercy to no one should he untangle the thread to its end.

The circumstances of Dzerzhinskii's death give food for thought. According to the published diagnosis, he died of a heart attack right at a meeting of the Central Committee, during which he twice engaged Kamenev and Piatakov in angry debate. The text of those speeches surprises one by the

insignificance of the subject of their discussions. It would seem that a man that sick would not find it necessary to speak out twice on such an ordinary matter. It is said that Stalin intentionally poured oil on the fire to drag out the meeting. Finally Dzerzhinskii collapsed before the eyes of his comrades, with some of whom he had managed to quarrel irreparably. Knowing Stalin's ways, one can surmise that medical aid was not given in time or not entirely properly . . .

Regardless of how Frunze had died, in November 1925 the position at the head of the RKKA fell vacant. There was no obvious successor to the People's Commissar. Trotskii's return was politically impossible. Sklianskii was dead. None of the purely military figures - S. Kamenev, Tukhachevskii, Egorov, or others - could be considered because of their pasts. By contemporary standards the head of the Red Army had to possess two qualities: a solid Party background (a member or candidate member of the Politbiuro, or at the very least a member of the Central Committee), and military experience. That narrowed the choice drastically.

An additional limitation was placed by the two main factions within the Central Committee, which would not consider the appointment of any of Trotskii's former associates. N. I. Muralov, Antonov-Ovseenko, and I. N. Smirnov were eliminated by that consideration. The Stalinists and Zinov'evites would have to agree to the appointment, as neither faction had the upper hand with the Congress.

Who might the Central Committee factions recommend? The first might nominate Stalin, Ordzhonikidze, and Voroshilov; the second Lashevich, and possibly G. Ia. Sokol'nikov. From the military point of view none of these was a first-class candidate, but they all met the formal qualifications. The great majority of the Party leadership - the "swamp" - were perplexed. It got

to the point that several members of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission asked the military men gathered for Frunze's funeral whom they would like to see as People's Commissar? Tukhachevskii, for one, named Ordzhonikidze.<sup>25</sup> But such questions are not decided by referendum.

Finally Voroshilov's candidacy was advanced. We do not have reliable information on how that appointment was accomplished. There is an interesting legend, however, that is worth recording. At a special meeting of the leadership (it is unknown if this was a formal plenum of the Central Committee) the candidacies of Ordzhonikidze and Stalin were discussed first. The secretaries of the national communist parties are said to have advanced Stalin's candidacy, hoping thereby to free themselves from his brilliant leadership and iron hand, which they had felt earlier than others. But Iosif Vissarionovich's situation was not ideal. Emmanuil Kviring was slated to replace him as General Secretary. Kviring was not an unimportant person: in 1914 he had been secretary of the Bolshevik faction in the State Duma; after the revolution he was one of the organizers of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) in the Ukraine; and in 1923 its first secretary. The post of General Secretary was then considered technical and organizational, but not political. It became that only after the 14th Congress, which met a month later.

If it had been proposed to replace Stalin with one of the great leaders of the Party, then Stalin, through his underlings, might complain of intrigues. But with Kviring it was different. He was the same sort of bureaucratic figure as was Stalin. To let the Party apparatus out of his hands was like death to Stalin, but he rose the occasion. "Of course," he said about himself in the third person, "comrade Stalin will go where the Party needs him. But Kviring will make a bad General Secretary."<sup>26</sup> Ordzhonikidze was allegedly



irreplaceable as executive secretary of the trans-Caucasus regional committee. (Beria was still very young, and Stalin did not have another of his own men at hand.) Then someone, probably one of the Stalinists, proposed Klim Voroshilov, an old Bolshevik (since 1903), an ex-metal worker from Lugansk, a hero of the civil war, and currently a commander.

As usual the fresh suggestion at a protracted meeting provided psychological relief and seemed therefore attractive. Zinov'ev, who was preoccupied with the battle brewing within the Party, apparently did not raise serious objections. Avoiding Unshlikht, M. Lashevich was appointed Voroshilov's first deputy.

Voroshilov's appointment as Chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council and People's Commissar of Army and Navy was one of the great sensations of the time. Only 21 months after Lenin's death, while the Party leadership was seriously divided, and the country in serious economic difficulties (who knew then that they would become chronic?), responsibility for the defense of the country was laid upon a man whose abilities and past activities, it would seem, made him unsuitable for the role.

Let us try to examine Voroshilov's qualities calmly and objectively - from the standpoint of those times. On the one hand he was enormously popular: an activist of the revolutionary underground, the first army commander to rise from the working class, political commissar of the victorious First Horse Army, and so forth. On the other hand, Voroshilov did not enjoy authority at the top either in the military or among the politicians. Lenin, by the way, did not think much of Voroshilov. And that is understandable. Only recently become a metal worker, Voroshilov had never studied. He had neither a general not a military education. The civil war had shown that he possessed personal bravery and revolutionary enthusiasm, but he had not risen higher than

commissar-mass agitator. There were serious failures in his military career. We have mentioned the Tsaritsyn episode, but there were worse. After the unauthorized surrender of Khar'kov in 1919, Voroshilov was turned over to a revolutionary tribunal. They did not consider his action treasonable, but they judged him incompetent and decided not to permit him to hold positions of command in the army in the future.<sup>27</sup> Voroshilov became a political worker. Only Stalin's patronage and his personal participation in the taking of Kronshtadt helped him regain a troop command. In 1921 he was made head of the North-Caucasus Military District and in May 1924 was transferred to the Moscow district. Voroshilov simply did not compare favorably with his predecessors, not with Frunze, even less with Trotskii. No underground songs were composed about him. But soon there were others, official and providing royalties.

We might be accused of prejudice or unobjectivity. Fortunately we have a characterization of Voroshilov written by a man who stands ideologically above suspicion. This is what Lieutenant General A. I. Todorskii, a famous military figure, and a participant in the civil war who worked with Voroshilov many years in the central apparatus of the People's Commissariat, wrote:

Everyone knew that Voroshilov was Stalin's arms bearer, his spokesman and mouthpiece. Even Budennyi and Egorov, Voroshilov's army friends, greeted his appointment with no particular enthusiasm. For such military figures as Tukhachevskii Voroshilov's appointment as People's Commissar marked the coming to military power of an openly unobjective Party leader, an apologist for the doctrine and mind-set of the former member of the Revolutionary Military Council of the South-West Front, Stalin. It was very revealing that in all the years he knew them,

Voroshilov never could find a common language even with Bliukher and Dybenko, who were ex-workers like himself.

The People's Commissar zealously employed famous Stalinist aphorisms, like: "We do not want a foot of others' land, but we will not yield an inch of our own," "War only on enemy territory," et cetera. Of course, one could not base a whole military program upon these Stalinist expressions (to take measures to defend interior territory for example; or to work out plans for evacuation, etc.). The Commissar's narrowly propagandistic views on the larger questions of defense were adopted with misplaced enthusiasm by such of his followers as E. A. Shchadenko, one of the most odious petty tyrants in our Army.

Voroshilov entered the post-war history of the Red Army as a good driver and marksman with a revolver. Undoubtedly these personal qualities were not sufficient for the leader of the Workers-peasants' Army, especially in a country (then) in capitalist encirclement. However, Voroshilov became famous in the post-war period for turning the whole history of the civil war into glorification of Stalin, in service to the cult of his personality. In 1929 to mark Stalin's fiftieth birthday, Voroshilov published his work, Stalin and the Red Army, which opened a new era in the study of our military history. More than that, Voroshilov besmirched his own reputation as a hero of the civil war by his complicity in the liquidation of the old military

specialists in 1930 and the destruction of the commanders and commissars in 1937-1938.

. . . The whole organism of the Red Army was like an ordinary apple tree to Stalin and Voroshilov. As long as it would produce new apples next year, they would shake it as hard as they liked.<sup>28</sup>

However you look at it, it becomes clear that in 1925 Voroshilov did not possess the personal qualities needed in a top military leader. This did not necessarily portend his failure in that role. Life can be likened to theater, but with an important reservation: life's actors do not have written roles, they must improvise - often in the most incredible situations.

At the age of 44 Voroshilov could open in an unexpected new role. The revolution for the time being had brought to stage front people who in the previous era had not been quoted on the political markets, who literally had no value. Who in 1915, 1916, or even 1917 could have foreseen in civilian Frunze, lieutenant Tukhachevskii, or noncom Budennyi the commanders who would lead huge masses of people into battle and for several decades determine the fate of the country. Even the commanders-in-chief Vatsetis and S. Kamenev, and army commanders Egorov and Shorin were only colonels in the world war without any real prospect of becoming generals or occupying top posts. Therefore his worker heritage and lack of education did not for ordain the failure of Voroshilov's career as leader of the armed forces of the Soviet Republic.

Alas. These considerations were and remain purely speculative. It was precisely in the battles of the revolution that Voroshilov's worthlessness as a military leader were revealed. He was not swept to the top by the

revolutionary wave, but by conspiracies carried out for narrowly selfish purposes.

Voroshilov's appointment was accompanied by numerous other changes in the apparatus of the People's Commissariat and in the commands of military districts. These rotations did not have the character of purges. Their goal was, first of all, to remove top commanders from posts they had long occupied in order to disrupt relations among them and thereby avert possible resistance to the new leadership. Only a week after his appointment Voroshilov announced a major shake-up of commanders.<sup>29</sup> Egorov lost his post as commander of the Ukrainian region but remained a member of the Revolutionary Military Council. Iakir, who had been commandant of the Department of Military Academies (UVUZ), took his place. Putna replaced Iakir. The commander of the Turkestan front, Levandovskii, was put in charge of the Caucasus Red Army, which Kork had just left to take over the Western district. The former commander of the Western district, Tukhachevskii, became the chief of staff of the RKKA, a position until then occupied by commander-in-chief S. Kamenev, who became inspector of the Red Army.

Thanks to all that, Stalin could be assured during the battles of the December Congress that the army was busy surviving the re-shuffling of its commanders.<sup>30</sup> To a large extent this was done just in case. Zinov'ev did not have many supporters in the army and did not trust former officers. That intriguer and panic-monger slept badly nights, tortured by historical and foreign analogies. In 1926 he convinced himself that the Red Army of the NEP period would produce a Soviet Chiang Kai-shek.

Tukhachevskii was very young when he came to head the general staff, only 32. In the past he had not had to do any headquarters work. His strategic concepts were still very immature. The main thrust of his activity at that

time was an attempt to organize the technical rearmament of the army. He was not able to accomplish much. True, in 1926 the secret Soviet-German agreement on military cooperation was concluded. In contravention of the confining articles of the Versailles treaty the Reichswehr obtained testing grounds for its tanks and airfields in Soviet territory, in exchange for which Germans instructed Red commanders in military science. In 1928-1929 Iakir, Tukhachevskii, Bliukher, Timoshenko, and many others attended courses at the German General Staff Academy.

There was nothing with which to arm the Red Army. There were various types of small arms, for which there were often no shells. The tanks, planes, and cars could be counted on fingers. To give the army the technical equipment it needed, it would be necessary to construct a special defense industry as part of the general process of industrialization. Tukhachevskii wrote about all this in a memorandum in 1927,<sup>31</sup> but Stalin and Voroshilov were too preoccupied to give it the attention it deserved. They were in the midst of the struggle with the opposition to see who would run the Party and the country. Stalin exclaimed, "Nonsense," when he had read Tukhachevskii's report. In 1930 when Tukhachevskii repeated his appeal, the reaction was the same. Stalin told him, approximately, this is the militarization of the country; no Marxist in his right mind would embark on that course.

Early in 1928 Tukhachevskii wrote the Central Committee and the government: "Either I do not understand general political circumstances, or I am misunderstood by the political leadership. In either case I can not remain at my post. It is possible that more than pride was at stake, that Tukhachevskii wanted to extricate himself from an awkward situation. His resignation was accepted. Tukhachevskii departed for Leningrad to take over command of the military district.

PART THREE

The Great Turning Point





## Chapter 11

### Scholarly Arguments

Between them everything was subject for controversy and debate.

Pushkin

(Eugene Onegin translated by Dorteia Prall Radin and George Z. Patric, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1937)

The Red Army, like every army, needed military science. In the first two years of its existence a fairly extensive system of study and preparation of commanders was organized along with its executive organs. Practically all the professors and instructors of the military educational institutions came from the old army. This did not mean that they brought with them the spirit and mood of the past. On the contrary, most of them had believed before the revolution that the autocracy and its army could not guarantee the defense of the country. Now in the new conditions they had a chance to establish the theoretical basis for the RKKA.

The enormous disruption of the whole structure of life led inevitably to a reexamination of accepted views. Bitter disputes broke out in all spheres. In the army they took the form of arguments about a unified military doctrine.

This problem had its history. It had arisen after the defeat in the war with the Japanese. Some of the generals (A.M. Zaionichkovskii, M.D. Bonch-Bruevich) feared that accepting such a doctrine might pattern and

stagnate military thought. Others (A.A. Neznamov, A. Dmitrievskii) insisted on the fruitfulness of an orderly unity of views. The emperor Nicholas II summed the matter up. In 1912 he announced to the commandant of the Military Academy General Ianushkevich, "Military doctrine consists in fulfilling my orders. I ask you to tell Neznamov for me to address this question in the press no longer..."<sup>1</sup>

The discussion was reopened in 1918 in a speech by former Major-General V. E. Borisov and was widely debated in 1920-1921. In the latter period most of the participants displayed quick tempers and a peremptory manner. The subject of the debate was never clearly defined.

A. A. Svechin's report "The Foundations of Military Doctrine" and his article on that topic triggered the debate in 1920.<sup>2</sup> According to Svechin, military doctrine was "a point of view from which to understand military history, its experience, and lessons...Military doctrine is military, and particularly, tactical philosophy; doctrine creates certainty which is the soul of every action."<sup>3</sup> He thought it necessary to unify views at a tactical level and through educational programs, regulations, and manuals to reach the "great mass of the army." Svechin considered it useful to deal only with a required minimum of technical knowledge and did not infringe on creative freedom in strategy and politics.

Neznamov spoke out again to support the position he had earlier held. He believed that "military doctrine expresses the view of the people and the government on war, in accordance with which foreign policy is conducted and the armed forces are organized."<sup>4</sup> Such convictions have the scent of militarism upon them as they put the approach to war (military interests) at the foundation of politics. After the formulation and adoption of a doctrine, it is reflected in military regulations. Various other military specialists

to differing degrees supported Svechin or Neznamov. But the primary watershed of opinion lay elsewhere.

F. Trutko, a participant in the civil war and a student at the Academy, posed the principal question of the discussion. He said there was no point discussing whether a doctrine was needed; we do need our own, proletarian, communist, military doctrine; we have only to devise it. But that can not be entrusted to the generals of the tsarist army. First of all, they had had more than enough time before the revolution and failed to produce a military doctrine. And most importantly, they do not understand the Marxist method.<sup>5</sup>

After this reconnaissance in force the heavy artillery was brought into play-Trotsky and Frunze. As strange as it may seem, these two Bolsheviks sharply disagreed. Frunze took this position: (1) our military doctrine must be a class doctrine, i.e. proletarian, i.e. Marxist; (2) its basic tenets must be worked out, precisely formulated, and decreed. Frunze based his own ideas on the experience of the civil war, to which he attached exceptional importance, often to the detriment of previous military history.<sup>6</sup>

Trotsky retorted to both of Frunze's points in his article "Military Doctrine or Pseudo-military Doctrinaire Attitude?"<sup>7</sup> Without denying the need for unity of view on military questions, he decisively rejected the possibility of fixing them as firmly as standard weights and measures. If there is not a pertinent paragraph, one must think; but if there is a paragraph, then no one will bother to think. Trotsky spoke out against making a fetish of the experience of the Red Army in the civil war and called upon his countrymen to diligently study military arts. He ridiculed the suggestion that there might be a particularly proletarian military science. In general the People's Commissar did not highly regard the application of the Marxist method outside politics, as this rather famous dictum of his

testifies: "Those who think we can arrange work in a candle factory with the help of Marxism, know very little about Marxism or about making candles."<sup>8</sup>

The discussion was carried over to the 11th Party Congress, at which nothing was decided. At a special meeting of military delegates, Trotskii and Frunze made reports. Before that Frunze spoke of the Congress in the lobby with Lenin, who gently but firmly supported Trotskii. Lenin disliked psuedo-Marxist blather. It would seem that that helped Frunze see the excessive dogmatism of his position. In any case he announced at the meeting that on the question of military doctrine and science he had no disagreements with Trotskii. It is true that they still disagreed about the character of a future war, but we will discuss that later.

No official Soviet military doctrine was proclaimed. In the 1930's, however, the army had foisted upon it three provisions by Stalin, which turned out to be more harmful than any decreed doctrine: (1) war could have few casualties and must be fought on foreign soil, (2) we need not a foot of foreign land, but we will not give up a single inch of our own, and (3) in the rear of any aggressor the Red Army will find support in the form of an uprising of workers and peasants.

The polemics surrounding military doctrine were not the only point of disagreement in the military. Therefore its inglorious conclusion did not lead to agreement and unity of views. A heated, uncompromising debate arose about an even more important subject. Many military commanders and scholarly authorities were drawn into it. Each had to answer a vital question: what will be the nature of future war, and what action will the Red Army and the Soviet government take in it?

It ought to be remembered that this discussion came hot on the heels of the civil war, and that most of the participants in it had not yet cooled off

from the heat of battle. It is entirely likely therefore that the experience of the civil war served as the starting point for practically all the reasoning, assertions, and prophecies involved in it.

The subject of the debate has been well and thoroughly described by professor Svechin.<sup>9</sup> There are two major forms of strategy--the strategy of smashing (or destruction) (sokrushenie) and the strategy of attrition (izmor). Svechin admitted that the terms are not entirely adequate, but they have become established in military literature. Smashing assumes decisive actions, unrestrained offense with the goal of total destruction of the living forces of the enemy, or at least of taking them out of action. Proponents of attrition see the more skillful use of resources--people, arms, economy, territory--as the major factor in winning a war. The primary emphasis on physical destruction or neutralization always costs dearly and as a rule leads to the aggressor's defeat. If we have enough strength when the enemy weakens, we will not be in condition to continue the war and will capitulate.

That is how Svechin presented the problem. The younger commanders of the Red Army led by Frunze unanimously favored the strategy of destruction. Trotskii, without getting involved in the debate, supported thorough preparation for war and warned against neglecting defense. Frunze several times reappraised his position, but Tukhachevskii, Triandafillov, Varfolomeev, and others maintained their views for a long while. The logic of the "destroyers" was simple. War would be exclusively mobile. Success depended on mobility and fire power, for which troops would have to be supplied to the utmost with tanks, automobiles, planes, artillery, and the chemicals of war. Defense was senseless, because there was no defense against such powerful offensive weaponry. It would be best to gather as much force as possible into

a strike force and with a series of well-planned strikes destroy the enemy. This was the strategy of blitzkrieg, which in Russia came from two sources.

One was associated with ideology, and here the destructive conception continued the line of particularly proletarian doctrine. We are a young class, rising, aggressive. The moving forces of history are working for us. Torn by contradictions the capitalist world will be forced on the defensive. Its destruction is inevitable, as was taught by the only truly scientific theory, Marxism. The capitalist countries could not be strong in their rear areas. Without fail their proletariats would revolt and welcome the Red Army as liberators.

The other source of inspiration was the recent victory in the civil war. In that war combat action was carried out extremely energetically. The larger campaigns were brief and ended decisively. Both sides preached the strategy of the destructive offense, despite the fact that the Bolsheviks, as a rule, not only turned back the offensives thrown at them (Kolchak, Denikin, Iudenich), but eventually effected the total defeat of their enemies. There was only one sad exception--the march on Warsaw--but the preferred explanation for that was to blame the mistakes of the front commanders.

Arguments like that for the offensive strategy was entirely convincing for many. But not for all. Svechin and a number of other old generals considered the analysis of the civil war incomplete and superficial, and the conclusions hasty. First of all, there was no certainty that later wars would necessarily resemble the civil war. That war, and all other civil wars in history, were exceptions from the point of view of strategic circumstances. Both sides had to understand that their enemies' victory meant not simply their military defeat but their physical destruction. Hence the extreme bitterness of the

fight and the effort to decide its outcome by strategic means alone as soon as possible.

Along with this subjective factor there were objective factors at work that determined the offensive nature of the campaigns. Both the Whites and the Reds had to depend on unreliable rears: weak economies, disrupted communications, populations tired of war. Additionally the rear areas frequently changed hands. The front was not continuous, and there were practically no prepared defenses. The density of fire was many times less than in the world war.

In such conditions a war of maneuvering and a preference for attack were both natural. In the confrontation with Poland, which did have a relatively solid rear, such a strategy was not justified. The deeper the Red Army advanced into the enemy territory, the stiffer the resistance became; it did not weaken as the preferred theory said it should. As strange an aberration of their class view as it might have been, the proletariat of Poland did not view the Red Army as their liberators. At the same time it was being learned that the Entente's home fronts were sufficiently strong and reliable.

The most serious error was made in the assertion that the Red Army had gained victory over the Entente. That chose to ignore that the notorious campaign of fourteen nations was only a propagandistic exaggeration. The author of that cliché was Winston Churchill, who proclaimed early in 1919 that he would send that number of states against Russia and take Petrograd by September.<sup>10</sup> As is well known, the campaign of the united forces never did happen: the troops of the major powers of the coalitions had been too exhausted in the world war. On January 16, 1920 the Supreme Council of the Entente resolved not to interfere directly in Russian affairs. Official Soviet historiography has refused up to now to recognize that fact.<sup>11</sup>

As for an enumeration of the fourteen nations, one can unfortunately not be found in any Soviet publication. We have barely managed to compile such a list, which includes sixteen countries: England, France, Italy, Greece, Japan, Germany (the voluntary corps of Fon-der Golts), Czechoslovakia ( the Czechoslovak Corps), Poland, Ukraine, Belorussia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Turkey, Finland, and the USA. It can even be expanded, since the independent trans-Caucasian republics are sometimes counted among the enemies of Soviet power.

Altogether the so-called interventionists numbered approximately 400,000.<sup>12</sup> That includes the armies of the national minorities on the borders of the Russian empire, which fought on their own territories. The major countries of the Entente were able to send only small expeditionary contingents with limited goals: England--45,000; France (together with Greece)--20,000; USA--7000; Japan--three infantry divisions (or by other data 70,000). The contribution of the West to the civil war came down, basically, to material assistance to the Whites.

In analyzing the civil war, the destroyers changed their accents. They did not understand that the Reds' victory had been gained not only and not mostly by military successes, but by superior policies--the decree on land, massive mobilization, more skillful propaganda and agitation, possession of the capitals, recruitment to their side of a significant part of the officer corps.

These errors, so obvious today, have an entirely reasonable explanation. Beaten armies examine past defeats to learn their errors, while victors tend to exaggerate the value of their of their actions. In any case they are strongly tempted to adhere to the strategy that brought them victory yesterday. We must give Trotskii his due; he several times warned the



Bolsheviks not to pride themselves overly on their military victories. He pointed out that these had been achieved not by any great military skill, but thanks to the revolutionary enthusiasm of the masses, numerical superiority over the enemy, and other less-than-glorious reasons.

We have come now to the story of the military figure who already in the 1920's had rejected the destruction concept. He worked out a theory of the conduct of a future war which has turned out to be so perspicacious that half a century later we have little to add. That was Aleksandr Andreevich Svechin. Soviet historiography to the present has not given him the attention he deserves, and on the few instances in which he is mentioned, treats him prejudicially.<sup>13</sup>

Svechin was born on August 17, 1878 in Ekaterinoslav (now Dnepropetrovsk). Following the example of his father, a major-general in the Russian army, Svechin embarked on a military career from boyhood: the cadet corps and Mikhailovskii military school. In line service from 1895, he later completed the Nikolaevskii Academy of general staff. Svechin displayed a profound interest in new weapons and in 1909 was sent on temporary duty to Germany to attend an aviation exhibition. He had earlier served through the whole far-eastern campaign and survived the catastrophe of the Russian army. From the time of Mukden, in his words, he began a serious revision of his values, which for a man of his position was very painful. His conclusion was likewise discomfitting: the autocratic order did not guarantee the defense of the country.

Svechin spent most of the world war at the front. He was wounded and advanced from regimental commander to chief of staff of the army. He was decorated with all military orders from St. Vladimir to St. George, with medals, and with St. George's Sword for bravery.

In 1918 Svechin voluntarily entered the service of the new-born RKKA. They immediately employed the experienced combat general in highly responsible positions: chief of staff of the Western sector of the Screen (zavesa), military instructor of the Smolensk region of the Screen, chief of the All Russian Main Staff (Vserosglavshtab), which was at first the general staff, and from September 1918 the organ directing the organization of reserves.

In 1918 Svechin also began to teach at the Military Academy. At first this was just one of his duties, but he soon was doing it full time and not long after became the director of the history of military arts for all academies. Svechin was extremely strict with his students. He gave no one points for a proletarian background, military honors, or Marxist erudition. One has to think that even then Svechin had begun to be disenchanted with the Bolsheviks' methods. All the ideological blather, which had no place in military affairs, and the commissar-overseers, who were for the most part semiliterate but were nonetheless becoming intrusive busybodies, must have been especially annoying. But Svechin could not just stand aside and shirk responsibility. He saw his duty as a patriot and a soldier to contribute to the defense of Russia by thoroughly preparing its commanders.

A result of his approach to teaching was sharp confrontations with his students, among whom were numerous illustrious commanders of high rank. In these episodes Svechin did not stand on ceremony. He could ridicule and embarrass laggards, braggarts, and militant ignoramuses in the classroom.

Svechin was hated and feared, and respected. Even V. I. Chapaev, who left the Academy after a famous run-in with Svechin, apparently acknowledged that Svechin had been right. In his report to the higher command he explained his desire to leave the Academy as caused not by nagging or persecution, but by his own ignorance, and promised to complete his education after the war.<sup>14</sup>

Svechin was a great military writer, undoubtedly the most outstanding of the post-October period in Russia. An extraordinary number of works flowed from his pen<sup>15</sup> including the famous Strategy, a unique and in its day vital book, which ought to have begun a new era in Russian and world literature. But in Russia only the old army intelligentsia recognized its worth, and to Western readers it remained largely unknown. Since the last publication of the whole of Strategy fifty years have passed. Its author's fate was tragic, in the spirit of his country and his epoch.

Svechin was the first to note that the changing conditions and forms of war had made the traditional division of military arts into strategy and tactics unsatisfactory. "Clausewitz' strategy began to obsolesce the moment cannons came into use, leaving the direction of the whole battle to tactics."<sup>16</sup> Contemporary battle (operation) is unbelievably extended in time and space; it no longer fits in the framework of old tactics. Svechin detached the strategy of battle, which he called operational art. The name has been adopted in Soviet military literature without reference to its author.

Svechin's primary interests lay in the field of strategy. He developed his concepts on the basis of a thorough study of military history combined with a sober analysis of international affairs. The conclusions he reached are free from political blinders and of nationalistic prejudices. Svechin was among the first to understand that the total and prolonged character of a world war was not happenstance, not a result of the errors of military and state leaders. The next war would spread across the planet even more widely and demand of every warring country an extreme concentration of all their energies. All state and economic institutions, all the life of the nation would be subordinated to military interests.

In a total war, Svechin affirmed, the strategy of destruction is not only useless, it is suicidal. It had been suitable for the Napoleonic wars. The strategy of attrition had replaced it. The foes of Germany had achieved victory in the world war by its application. Svechin is rarely written about in the Soviet Union, and when he is invariably the stories are fabrications. Some say he invented the strategy of attrition, which is foreign to the spirit of the Soviet Army. Others assert he plagiarized from the works of Delbruck. All of this is intentional distortion of the facts, or at best just a superficial glance at his significance. Svechin did not need to invent his strategic principles, inasmuch as the laws of military art are known from ancient times and, in general, are as invariable as the laws of logic, which are their foundation. The forms of their application change depending on the scale and character of the wars, the development of weapons, and so forth. Strategies calculated to exhaust the enemy were widely used in the eighteenth century, and Delbruck did write a great deal about it, but familiarity with his work is in no way a reproach to Svechin. His great merit consists in having worked out a strategy of attrition for contemporary conditions. He, furthermore, showed that in a world war it is the more sensible, economic, and apparently the only way to achieve victory.

The dominant view of the time, that the Red Army must attack, Svechin rejected as groundless. In modern war a resolute assault ("an attack of the destructive style") consumes incalculable resources, which, as a rule, is not justified by the operational gains. Attacking troops have always to face the threat that their lengthening lines of communication will be cut, or that they will be attacked on their flanks or from the rear. In other words the risks in attacking are great, and the value of possible gains is doubtful. In the opening phase of war it is more expedient to keep on the strategic defensive.

...a politically aggressive goal can be combined with strategic defense. The battle is conducted at the same time on economic and political fronts, and if time works in our favor, that is if the balance of pluses and minuses is favorable, then the armed front, even if it only marches in place, might gradually achieve a favorable change in the relationship of forces.<sup>17</sup>

Strategic defense might permit the loss of some territory, therefore it cannot always be applied by small countries. For Russia, however, Svechin insisted, that method of conducting a war is the most suitable. The enemy would be forced to waste resources to conquer territory, to establish communications, to overcome intermediate defense lines, and so forth. Meanwhile we would preserve our forces until the the advantage became ours. That goal must be held to unwaveringly without giving in to the seductive temptation to give battle in unfavorable circumstances from considerations of prestige or historical memory:

A hurriedly deployed defense would act least economically by heaping up troops in front of the attackers or by occupying a series of lines in the path of the assault. Saddest are those defensive maneuvers which expend armed forces in large numbers in conditions for which the enemy has best prepared.<sup>19</sup>

As is well known it was precisely that wanton course which Stalin, Timoshenko, and Zhukov chose in the early period of the Fatherland War. Not only were they responsible that the country entered the war unprepared, but they aggravated the extent of the catastrophe. With the country ravaged and perplexed internally, still they chose to demonstrate their iron resolve--in

an attempt to save their foundering prestige. In the first months of the war with dull persistence they threw millions of Red Army men under the wheels of Hitler's locomotive and still let the Germans reach the walls of Moscow. It is easy to cite examples of the ignorance of our command in elementary strategic questions, but we will not do so in this chapter. It is sufficient to note that Svechin predicted the principal aspects of the war with startling precision. It is easy to believe that neither Stalin nor his subordinate commanders had read Svechin. What is strange is that now official Soviet historiography, led by General Zhilin,<sup>20</sup> has to acknowledge the decisive role of the counter-offensive, which was prepared in the depths of a strategic defense. This is presented as a revelation of the World War II, practically an invention of the Soviet command. References to Svechin are as usual absent. But surely they were aware of his work...

In examining the forms of offensive action Svechin again demanded the test of expediency and that decisions be well-founded.

The forms of operations--operational encirclement, breakthrough, seizure, flank assault--are not chosen arbitrarily, but are dictated by the relationships of forces and means, the existing distribution of forces, the strength of various main lines of transportation, and the configuration of the theater of military action and its most important boundaries.

Preparation for attack must meet the requirements of defense, that is, the security of one's forces. Operational deployment can only be successful when it is realized quickly and secretly. The offensive itself must unhesitatingly pursue its objectives, but it is important to recognize in time "the bound where an offensive becomes an adventure" and presents the enemy a good target

for counter-attack. In general it is bad to assume an offensive formation when there is not about to be an offensive. In that formation the defensive options of the troops are necessarily weakened.

These and other provisions of his strategy sound like common truths. All the more do people who undertake to lead troops without having learned the rudiments of military science deserve no mercy. Svechin did not seek the laurels of a prophet: "Prophecy in strategy can only be charlantry. Not even a genius has the power to foresee how a war will actually turn out."<sup>22</sup> That he was able to foresee as much as he did adds to the greatness of this remarkable man.

The literature about Frunze is rather extensive, although not all of it is entirely veracious. We have already mentioned that interesting figure above. Here we will discuss only those aspects of the man and his work which are connected with the subject of this chapter.

Frunze was a true revolutionary and firmly believed in the justice of the Bolshevik cause. It is not surprising that he whole heartedly supported the offensive school. "Between our proletarian state and the rest or the bourgeois world there can be only a state of war, long, obstinate, desperate war to the death."<sup>23</sup> Aggression was the inalienable right of the proletariat: "By the historical revolutionary process of life itself the working class will be forced to go on the offensive whenever favorable conditions arise."<sup>24</sup>

(Such pronouncements put those who varnish the truth about the history of Bolshevism in an awkward position, but a true picture of Frunze can be gained only from such honesty and candor.) The Red Army, the main weapon of the working class, must be prepared to carry out its aggressive mission in any sector of a future front: "The borders of that front are first of all the whole continent of the Old World."<sup>25</sup>

Starting from these political purposes, Frunze at first took up an extreme "destructive" position. In the main his views were indistinguishable from those of most of the commanders of the RKKA. Wars would be revolutionary, exclusively mobile, and consequently perfectly suited for an offensive strategy. ". . . I recommend that except for the absolutely necessary we undertake no defensive work. It would be better to spend the money to repair barracks."<sup>26</sup>

That was in 1922. Soon, however, Frunze began to express different views in his speeches and articles. He was a man with a highly developed sense of responsibility. Pedantic dogmas could not replace common sense for him. As he advanced through the ranks, Frunze's strategic views changed until they were unrecognizable. Apparently familiarity with Svechin's book (1923) played an important role. Frunze was one of only a few Bolshevik military leaders who valued Svechin and protected him from attacks. He never spoke against Svechin, although the latter often expressed open disapproval of commissars, Marxism in military affairs, and other sacred relics.

By 1925 Frunze was ready to admit that the Red Army had not invented special proletarian power and decided to make use of the army's bourgeois heritage. He maintained that the revolutionary destiny of the working class necessarily gave the RKKA primarily an offensive character, but there was little left to his former aggressiveness.

Frunze was getting more serious. He expressed concern that the bourgeois world would long retain its technical superiority. That would have to be opposed by greater maneuverability and "little" partisan wars. The latter was natural in the land of the muzhik, because "guerrilla warfare...is nothing more than the military expression of the psychological make-up of our



peasantry."<sup>26</sup> Most important was his evaluation of a future war. He no longer spoke about the blitzkrieg and jaunty marches of liberation.

In the collision of two powerful enemies the outcome will not be decided with one blow. War will assume the character of a long and cruel contest, which will try all of the economic and political bases of the combatants. In the language of strategy, this marks the transition from the strategy of blitzkrieg to the strategy of attrition (istoshchenie).<sup>27</sup>

There, in that most important point, Frunze accepted Svechin's concept. Frunze continued to believe that the rear areas of the capitalist countries would be unreliable, but he did not attach much importance to it.

Having acknowledged the total character of future war and the strategy of exhaustion-attrition, Frunze did not fear to make the logical conclusion about the militarization of the country.

The task of preparing to defend the country in contemporary conditions is no longer within the current capabilities of the army or of the military alone. This must become the task of the whole country, of the whole Soviet apparatus.<sup>28</sup>

Of course, a highly developed country can prepare for war relatively quickly and does not need to undergo a long forced militarization. The USA is a good example. But Russia little resembles America, and Frunze knew that well.

We are not rich in good organizers. All of our work suffers from thousands of various shortcomings. Many of them are the result not of inability, but of simple disorder, slovenliness, and the absence of system. This explains why

we have had so little success despite our colossal opportunities.<sup>29</sup>

Frunze sincerely feared that these national characteristics would harm the defense capabilities of the country. He was not at all inclined to think that everything would take care of itself because of some natural advantages of the socialist system. Today his words sound like an ominous prophecy: "It would be a scandalous crime if in the face of such opportunities we were not able to place the defense of the Soviet Union of a high level."<sup>30</sup>

If Svechin was the leading military scholar of the 1920's, and Frunze the main figure in the organization of military affairs, Tukhachevskii was for a long while the ideologue of the young wave and the prime opponent of Svechin. At first the argument had an academic flavor, but in 1930-1931 it lost that. We will discuss that later.

Tukhachevskii's early work reveals talent, powers of observation, and, unfortunately, the peremptoriness of a lieutenant. The level of his thought on strategy always lagged behind his grasp of operational-tactical matters. His 1920 essay "National and class strategy", despite its title, is essentially a combat manual. In it the 27-year-old front commander enlightened middle- and high-level commanders about changes in the methods of conducting combat operations, which distinguished the civil war from the world war. Mainly Tukhachevskii gave practical advice about quashing various anti-Soviet uprisings, primarily peasant rebellions.

Already in this early work the author let slip many careless pronouncements having a pretense to universality. For example: "War always has economic causes. Capitalist countries wage wars to obtain markets or natural riches."<sup>31</sup>

Such sententiousness belongs in political literacy lessons but not in a work meant to be a generalization about strategy. Further: "Civil war is waged by an oppressed class against the class of exploiters..."<sup>32</sup>

Where then does the civil war in the USA fit, or similar wars in Mexico, Bolivia, Argentina, or in contemporary Africa? And where do you put peasant uprisings against Soviet power in this schema? His pronouncement that, "The usefulness of strategic reserves has always been doubtful,"<sup>33</sup> needs no commentary.

His next four works on the nature of future war all suffer from the same shortcoming.<sup>34</sup> We will try not to make unsubstantiated statements. Tukhachevskii wrote, "Getting the enemy to stand and give battle is advantageous for the attacker...it is most advantageous to conduct and offensive operation against an enemy who is stationary."

The author's thought is understandable. It is certainly simpler to plan such an offensive operation. But that is all. To speak of advantages is at least precipitate since it does not take into consideration the nature and strength of the defense.

His effort to find an all-embracing formula takes Tukhachevskii too far. He asserts, "The most useful destruction is achieved by capturing the enemy, since not only does it weaken the enemy, but the prisoners strengthen the captor's rear economically."<sup>35</sup> Tukhachevskii, who was himself a German prisoner, clearly does not understand the economic side of keeping prisoners of war. Furthermore he displays obvious ignorance of the applicable international conventions. More: "Strategy must make the tasks of tactics easy."<sup>36</sup> It has always been the task of strategy to win wars, not to make life easy on the tactical level. On the contrary tactics is supposed to serve

strategy, which places before it tasks that are necessary, but not necessarily easy. We could continue to extend the list of absurdities...

In the mid-20's a group of military men who agreed with Tukhachevskii and wished to reconstruct the army gathered around him. The most prominent of them were the Assistant Chief of Staff of the RKKA V. K. Triandafillov, Inspector of the Armored Forces K. B. Kalinovskii, and young commanders of various ranks N. E. Varfolomeev, S. M. Belitskii, A. M. Vol'pe, G. S. Isserson. All were actively involved in the work of military science. All preferred decisive action using modern technical means, and it was precisely in this area that they did achieve significant success. Thanks to their tireless work, which was fired by revolutionary enthusiasm, principles were worked out that laid the foundation for the greatest achievements of Soviet operational art in the next decade--the theory of deep operations.

There were other commanders who worked on the history and theory of combat operations. The old generals A. A. Brusilov, V. M. Klembovskii, A. M. Suleiman emphasized historical research and published a series of excellent works. The former commander-in-chief S. S. Kamenev analyzed separate aspects of the experience of the civil war. B. M. Shapashnikov worked out the theoretical bases for the operations of a general staff. I. I. Vatsetis, a former commander-in-chief, the prominent scholars A. E. Snegarev, A. I. Verkhovskii, who supported Svechin, and A. A. Neznamov, who opposed him, all made important contributions in theory.

By the end of this period an interesting tableau had formed. Intense scholarly work and active debates had brought the opposing points of view closer together. Everyone agreed that future war would be total, that it would become an exhausting contest of the warring sides. This view was

adopted by the political leadership as well. But at the same time the old  
premise hung on: the Red Army must always attack.



## Chapter 12

### Psychological Attack

On December 21, 1929, the 50th birthday of the General Secretary of the TsK VKP(b), Voroshilov's article "Stalin and the Red Army" appeared in Pravda. Kliment Efremovich, a simple man, employed no journalistic evasions but immediately took the bull by the horns:

For the last five or six years Stalin has been at the center of a large, contentious struggle. Only these circumstances can explain why the importance of comrade Stalin, one of the chief architects of victory in the civil war, has been somewhat pushed to the background and he has not received the credit he is due.<sup>1</sup>

See how simple: his contribution has been overshadowed by the other struggle, the internal party struggle, and only for that reason has not received its due credit, that is of course the highest credit.

Voroshilov did not pretend to elucidate the whole problem. He wanted only to "refresh the facts in the comrades' memories" and also "to publish several little-known documents, to show by the simple evidence of facts the truly exceptional role played by comrade Stalin at the tensest moments of the civil war."

It turned out, although it had not been noticed earlier, that in 1918-1920 comrade Stalin was "the only man whom the Central Committee threw from one front to the other, choosing the places most dangerous, most threatening to the revolution."

Pay attention: Stalin was the TsK's last trump, its magic wand, the man who saved the revolution when all else failed. It sounds convincing. Ten

years had not passed since the end of the civil war, and all the senior members of the TsK of that time, with the exception of Lenin and Dzerzhinskii were still alive. Consequently, they could confirm what Voroshilov wrote. The problem was that as a result of the "large and contentious struggle," by the end of 1929 the men who had been leaders of the Party in the first years of the revolution had been expelled from political life and deprived of a forum within the country. Trotskii, Zinov'ev, Kamenev, Krestinskii, Sokol'nikov, Smilga, and many others were expelled from the Party before the 15th Congress or at the Congress itself. Rykov, Bukharin, and Tomskii were destroyed as rightists shortly after the Congress. All of them could of course confirm, or, God forbid, deny, but they preferred to keep silence. If they were to say anything, where could they say it and whom would it interest? If victors are not judged, the defeated are not believed. Neither could the political leaders of the Red Army raise their voices. Trotskii was banished, Frunze dead, as was Sklianskii. There were still commanders of the civil war, but we will discuss them later. The people, as they always have in Russia, harkened to the voice of historical truth and kept silent.

Voroshilov could therefore boldly continue his research. From his article we learn that already at the dawn of Soviet power Stalin possessed those traits of omnipresence and omnipotence that became so easy to discover from the 30s to his death. Where all was quiet and peaceful during the civil war "comrade Stalin was not to be found." But if things were bad, there . . .

. . . comrade Stalin appeared. He did not sleep nights [that was because he preferred to sleep days], he organized, he took leadership into his own strong hand [entirely true], he smashed mercilessly [there is no denying that], turned the tide, and made things right.<sup>2</sup>



That is the thesis of Voroshilov's article. Stalin ensured success in all decisive sectors. It did not matter that Stalin himself had once called Trotskii the architect of the Red Army's victory. Great events are meant to be reevaluated . . . Voroshilov goes on describe episodes of the civil war in which Stalin's miracle-working powers were displayed. These episodes long remained landmarks of Soviet historiography. Only in them was the outcome of the war decided; all other events became secondary, insignificant.

Let us briefly trace Voroshilov's account. The reader ought to be sufficiently prepared for this by the chapters on the civil war.

Tsaritsyn. Stalin arrived there in June 1918 with a detachment of Red soldiers and two armored cars "in the capacity of head of all provisioning in South Russia." Voroshilov, who participated directly in the event, describes how Stalin immediately usurped military authority. As documentation he produced a telegram from the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic, that is from Trotskii, with a note about Lenin's concurrence. True, the quotation marks in the citation opened after Stalin's name, which leaves the meaning of the text open to question. We read in Voroshilov's article: "On comrade Stalin is laid the task 'to establish order, to combine the detachments with regular units, to establish proper command, to expel all who will not submit.'" First Stalin set about establishing "proper command": "Headed by comrade Stalin the RVS is established [a good use of the impersonal form], which will undertake the organization of a regular army." And of course: "The RVS headed by comrade Stalin will establish a special Cheka." Stalin criticized and persecuted everyone, especially Snegarev and his staff, but others were not left out. Voroshilov quoted the citation from the journal Donskaia volna, (Don Wave), with which the reader is already familiar.

This ardent, but amateur performance almost culminated in the loss of Tsaritsyn. The RVS of the Southern Front, of which Voroshilov had become a member, was reorganized and Stalin recalled, but Voroshilov chose not to mention that in his article, apparently out of respect for the birthday boy.

Perm'. At the end of 1918 the 3rd Army surrendered Perm. To investigate the causes the TsK sent a commission composed of Dzerzhinskii and Stalin: "The TsK asks the commission to take all necessary measures to restore Party and Soviet work in the regions of the 3rd and 2nd armies."<sup>3</sup> That would seem clear. The commission was given no military assignments. Dzerzhinskii soon returned to Moscow. As was his wont, Stalin very quickly became involved in military affairs. In particular he requested that Lenin send three reliable regiments. Later in one of his reports he offered that as his own accomplishment: "1200 reliable infantry and cavalry were sent to the front on 15 January." Voroshilov needed say no more. At that point he drew a conclusion that was neither logically nor factually supported by his evidence but was apparently politically necessary: "As a result of these measures not only was the enemy's advance halted, but in January 1919 the eastern front went over to the offensive . . . Ural'sk was taken."

That was how comrade Stalin understood his assignment "to investigate the causes of the catastrophe." We have already shown that there was no catastrophe, but without one the act does not possess the required glory. "I investigated, discovered the causes, and on the spot with my own forces removed them and turned the tables." Specifically: on the spot . . . my own forces . . . turned the tables.

Petrograd. Spring 1919. The Iudenich offensive. Mutinies at Fort Red Hill and Fort Gray Horse: "It was necessary to rescue the situation. The TsK

again chose comrade Stalin for the job. In three weeks comrade Stalin was able to turn things around."

Even without that, everyone knew that Iosif Vissarionovich was the greatest specialist in turning points. The same year that Voroshilov's article appeared, 1929, the great about face in Russian agriculture, from which the country has never recovered, was begun at Stalin's initiative.

Whatever the truth of this episode, Stalin's role could not have been significant. He was sent on temporary duty to Petrograd as the plenipotentiary extraordinary of the TsK (decision of May 17) in connection with the possible attack by Rodzianko's corps and the Estonians. The attack, which began May 26, broke through the Soviet front and took Iamburg and Pskov. The defending 7th Petrograd Army was unable to repulse the attack immediately because of a shortage of men and the defection of a number of commanders - the mutiny of the forts on June 13. The mutiny was suppressed by the end of June, but no decisive action occurred on the front until the fall. Pskov was retaken from the Whites on September 8. Stalin had departed long before that. In May and June 1919, while Stalin was there, Petrograd experienced neither mortal danger nor a turning point.

In 1919 the then all-powerful member of the Politbiuro Zinov'ev was also chairman of the Northern Commune. Petrograd was his eparchy, as Kamenev similarly ruled Moscow. Stalin could be sent to Petrograd as representative of the TsK, but only Zinov'ev could establish order or display power.

The Southern Front. Voroshilov was under Stalin's command on the Southern Front; therefore he devotes a great deal of space to this period.

Spring 1919. Danger threatened Tula, danger hung over Moscow. The situation had to be saved [how many times!].

The TsK sent comrade Stalin to the Southern Front as a member of the RVS. There is no longer any need to conceal .

. .

that, undertaking his assignment, Stalin made three stipulations:

- 1) Trotskii would not interfere in the affairs of the front,
- 2) officials not wanted by Stalin would be transferred, and
- 3) people he wanted would be sent to him.

The conditions sound fantastic and they are not confirmed by documentation. Moreover, Voroshilov himself soon contradicts them. As for sending needed people, that was the natural right of every leader and was unlikely to have been specifically stipulated. Stalin tried to plant his own people everywhere. For example, he brought his friend from Tsaritsyn, Voroshilov, to the Southern Front. The latter after the unauthorized surrender of Khar'kov, as we know, was removed from the 14th Army and released from command altogether. He was entrusted with the formation of the 61st Rifle Division, but was unable to lead it after its creation. Stalin called him not as a commander, but as a political worker.

According to Voroshilov, Comrade Stalin began with the most important thing - to change the strategic plan for Denikin's destruction. That story has long been disproven. Even from the document presented by Voroshilov it is obvious that Stalin simply supported one of the two available plans - Vatsetis' plan. This does not bother Voroshilov: "Comrade Stalin's plan was accepted by the TsK. Lenin wrote in his own hand the order to the field headquarters to immediately change the obsolete directives."

In passing, Stalin created the First Horse Army. But this is what is strange: that the independent Stalin (of the RVS of the Southern Front) wrote the RVS of the Republic, that is Trotskii, a humble report about the formation of the horse army with the concluding line: "Please confirm the aforesaid." The document is dated November 11, 1919. Trotskii issued the order about the creation of the First Horse on November 17, and on the 19th the RVS of the Southern Front (Egorov and Stalin) duplicated the order. That last date is celebrated as the birthday of the First Horse.<sup>4</sup>

After Denikin's defeat Stalin, according to Voroshilov, became indispensable. The authorities hurried to transfer him to the Northern Caucasus. But the unfailing Stalin jibbed.

In January 1920 as a result of serious errors by the front command [that is, Shorin - authors] our offensive at Rostov was dangerously held up . . . The TsK sent comrade Stalin a telegram: "In view of the necessity of establishing true unity of command on the Caucasus Front, supporting the authority of the front commander [the same Shorin - apparently the serious errors had not been discovered] and the army commander [Budennyi], the Politbiuro considers it absolutely necessary that you immediately join the RVS of the Caucasus Front."<sup>5</sup>

This refers to the Bataisk Bottleneck.<sup>6</sup> Stalin understood perfectly well that Voroshilov and Budennyi lacked the strength to drag their cavaliers out of comfortable Rostov to storm Bataisk. The relations between the command of the First Horse and Shorin were utterly destroyed. Stalin was supposed to pacify his proteges. But such a role was not to his taste and he resisted the assignment: (1) on the condition of his health (as if there were a different

climate at the Southern Front), and (2) because he feared that . . .

all of these transfers will be incorrectly understood by local party organizations, which will tend to accuse me of frivolously skipping from one field of administration to another, because of their ignorance of TsK decisions.<sup>7</sup>

How could Stalin know that ten years later this very skipping about would be proclaimed an enormous service?

The problem was settled by the nomination of Shorin's assistant Tukhachevskii.<sup>8</sup> Stalin was assigned to the battle against Vrangeli, who was only of secondary importance at the time, but "illness [new?] freed him from that work."

The Polish Campaign. Illness did not prevent Stalin from becoming a member of the RVS of the Southwest Front the command corps of which had been transferred as a unit from the Southern Front. Of course it was not a matter of the condition of his health. Simply it was easier for Stalin to work with the colorless and tractable Egorov.

In describing the events of the Polish theater, Voroshilov suddenly becomes reserved and careful. That is understandable. Warsaw was not taken. To a large degree that was the fault of Stalin, who sabotaged the commander-in-chief's order about the transfer of the First Horse and other troops from L'vov to Tukhachevskii. For that, as we recall, he earned a reprimand from the TsK and was removed from military work.

Voroshilov summed up Stalin's merits with brief reference to "comrade Stalin's organization of the First Horse raid." The ticklish situation of insubordination to the center he settled in two sentences:

The operations of the Southwest Front brought the Red troops right to L'vov. Only the failure of our troops at Warsaw

ruined [the plans of] the Horse Army, which was preparing to attack L'vov and was situated ten kilometers from it.

So that's how it was. It turns out that it wasn't the delay of the Horse Army that ruined the storming of Warsaw, but vice versa. Having performed that logical somersault, Voroshilov hastened to change the subject, "However, the period is so eventful, to explain it would require such massive documentation and thorough analysis, that it takes us far beyond the bounds of this article." It is hard to believe that the dashing commissar has suddenly become the professor-analyst. And why was such carefulness applied only to this one period? Simple. Voroshilov did not want to attach Stalin's name to an unsuccessful campaign.

Summing all of this up, Voroshilov offers a general, rather confused description of Stalin as a strategist, which concludes with the following pearl:

Comrade Stalin was always a proponent of the strictest military discipline and of centralization under the absolute but thoughtful and consistent administration of the highest military organs.

In other words, the orders of the center must be carried out only when one agrees with them. It would be interesting to know if Stalin still agreed with that interpretation of military discipline later when he promoted himself to commander-in-chief.

Voroshilov's article was a heavy blow to the Red Army. The People's Commissar and the Politbiuro member clearly demonstrated to the soldiers that in the USSR heroes and leaders of men were made not on the fields of battle but in the stillness of Kremlin offices.

It was another warning. All your honors count for nothing. If we want, we will rewrite history. Whenever it is needed.

It was also a spit in the face. They were telling men who had participated directly in the civil war, men who had been in the thick of the events how these events had happened. Later this became history - its only acceptable account. They had to study the lesson and forget the way they had remembered things.

Stalin, as always, acted carefully, leaving himself an out. If the balloon were shot down, he could always step aside and dump it all on Voroshilov: look, hot-headed Klim got carried away with the birthday celebrations. And anyway, what is important for us Marxists is classes, not personalities. It was a victory of the proletariat. Stalin could do that.

He did not have to retreat or take evasive action. The soldiers wiped themselves, put their hands in their pockets, and gave him the bird. In the third volume of the fundamental work Civil War, 1918-1921, printed in 1930, the editors, S. Kamenev, Tukhachevskii, and Eideman made the following footnote:

From the editors. This volume had gone to press when Voroshilov's article "Stalin and the Red Army" (GIZ, 1929) appeared. [The article] contains much new information about how the decision was made to direct the main attack against Denikin in the direction Kursk-Khar'kov-Donbass. Realization of the plan, as is well known, led to the destruction of Denikin . . .<sup>9</sup>

There followed long excerpts from Voroshilov's article.

Former commander of the Southern Front A. I. Egorov wrote in the foreward to his book The Defeat of Denikin (1931):



The author would like to emphasize here that the appearance of K. E. Voroshilov's extraordinarily valuable historical essay . . . helped him clarify and supplement several parts of this work.<sup>10</sup>

Here and above we hear the insult, possibly involuntary. Egorov, Commander-in-Chief Kamenev, et al, needed Voroshilov's opus to understand how they had defeated Denikin. It is unfortunate that only a handful of specialists could read that in the phrase. We ought also to note that the military histories we have mentioned were published in runs of only a few thousand, while Voroshilov's article appeared in millions of copies of Pravda and was repeatedly reprinted in huge editions.

In his first collision with the whole RKKA Stalin, thanks to artful maneuvering that was for the time being bloodless, gained an impressive moral victory.



## Chapter 13

### Personality in History: Role and Style

An apathetic society broken into small powerless elements, while it offers large opportunities for the development of a great power, at the same time creates many problems for that power by making difficult the establishment of state order without which such power is unstable.

Kliuchevskii

The question of the role of personality in history has not been sufficiently explained. It is hard to accept the point of view of total determinism, in which the role of personality is clearly secondary, in which it is wholly the obedient transmitter of inescapable historical laws and commands of the time. The opposite view, volutarism, ascribing unlimited potential to a strong personality, is no more convincing. In particular it rejects the timeliness of the appearance of great figures and the rapidity of their advancement. How can we believe that people of that nature and with those talents did not appear earlier? It would seem that, like disease-causing organisms, they are always present in the social body but that favorable conditions for their manifestation are not. If the conditions are present, they become the creators of history; if not, they vegetate in anonymity or fail to achieve anything. At the same time there is no doubt that each great person makes an original contribution to his epoch, puts upon his time the mark of his individuality. One must also think that the success of an historical person must also depend to a certain degree upon the persistence of his pursuit of a goal - if he has one. Last: all of the above is insufficient if happenstance is not also taken into consideration.

In the light of this amorphous and primitive conception Stalin does not look the guiding force of Russian history. It is impossible to believe that had he not been there the post-revolutionary development of the country would have taken an entirely different course. And if there had not been a revolution, what could Stalin have hoped for - to become a prominent provocateur? Did he have the courage and style to be another Azef?

Stalin did not create his own system. That is uninspired mysticism. The system gave birth to Stalin. Not otherwise. When it comes to talking about the complete contempt of "formal" (and every other) democracy, the legitimization of terror against potential enemies,<sup>1</sup> not to mention real enemies; when the punitive organs take into their own hands immediate execution without trial or investigation; when the taking and shooting of hostages is considered normal; when with a flourish of the pen whole ethnic and social groups can be systematically destroyed, it is meaningless to shed crocodile tears over Stalin's so-called abuses of power. The spirit and the letter of the type of law that lay at the base of his power demanded people like Stalin. Such legal norms open limitless horizons to the most pathological aspects of a leader's personality.

Stalin? What was Stalin? He, for the most part, gave that power form. The road toward that type of power had already been taken.

The features of his personality and the circumstances of his career explain why it was specifically Stalin and not somebody else who became the all-Russian dictator, but they do not allow us to conclude that without him there would not have arisen just such a dictatorship.

After the October revolution Stalin was in a very advantageous position. A representative of the national minorities, of which except for the Jews there were very few among the Bolsheviks, he was part of the small group that

seized power. It is worth remembering that he did not become a member of the Bolshevik TsK for services rendered to the revolution, for they were few. By displaying quick obedience, he managed to please Lenin who co-opted him into the Russian bureau of the TsK. For five years Stalin did not distinguish himself in any way, but he did manage to quarrel with Sverdlov, who had become powerful. In 1917, however, Stalin arrived in Petrograd earlier than Lenin and Sverdlov. Kamenev recruited him for work on Pravda. Il'ich arrived and scolded Kamenev and his subordinates for appeasement. Stalin did not take offense. The whole time between the revolutions he lived in Petrograd legally and got along with everybody. It is little known that in the name of the Petrograd Soviet, which was then led by the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries Stalin persuaded the Kronshtadt sailors, who had occupied the Peter and Paul fortress after the failure of the July days demonstration, to surrender their arms and leave the city. Stalin told them: You shouted, "All power to the Soviets!" Now carry out the Soviet's order. Stalin was not impatient for an armed uprising, and he rather skillfully defended Kamenev and Zinov'ev from Lenin's wrath.

In the first Council of People's Commissars he received the post Il'ich thought suitable, People's Commissar of Nationalities. It would have been impossible to fill the position with a Russian, and inexpedient to appoint a Jew - there were already too many of them. Besides that although the Jews were an oppressed minority, they were not typical of the minorities in that they did not occupy a traditional territory. Stalin had written about that in his role as specialist on the nationalities question. His writing smacked of anti-Semitism, but its packaging was purely Marxist, and Lenin chose to pretend that all was in order - it was useful in his struggle with the Bund.

Stalin was fairly quiet, businesslike, and extremely energetic - although not all his energy was directed toward the business at hand. Lenin's trust for him grew. Stalin's military errors were not especially visible - all of the leading Bolsheviks made their share of mistakes at the front. Stalin understood earlier than most of the others that it paid to follow Lenin without bothering to consider where or why because Lenin was the strongest of them. At the 8th Congress he fell from grace but quickly recovered. He sided with the leaders of the "military opposition", who fought against the use of tsarist officers in the Red Army. As soon as he noticed Lenin's negative reaction, however, he immediately stepped aside leaving his erstwhile compatriots to extricate themselves as best they could. At the stormy 10th Congress he followed directly in the wake of Lenin's battleship. For that he was rewarded with another commissariatship - in the Workers and Peasants' Inspection. The stern and decisive Stalin gained the reputation of a capable organizer.

In this way he became General Secretary of the RKP in 1922. Of course the post was then considered technical and clerical: someone had to keep the books and assign work to the Party cadres. It was not the work most revolutionaries cherished. While Lenin was in charge, the apparat did not have a powerful role. Lenin would make the decisions, or the Politbiuro, or rarely the TsK - and the apparat would follow orders. Lenin's illness changed things dramatically. His comrades-in-arms began to consciously measure the vacant purple. The combination of Zinov'ev, Stalin, and Kamenev against Trotskii was born. For the time being the distribution of roles satisfied everyone: Kamenev ran the affairs of the government, Zinov'ev had the political leadership, and the secretary of the TsK for organizational matters, Stalin, ran the apparat. It was in this role that he participated in the first

Congress after Lenin's death. He worked hard making connections, putting his people everywhere. Imperceptibly the apparat crushed the Party. An active Lenin would not have allowed that. He was super-sensitive to questions of power. Even sick he tried to oppose the evolution and raised the question of replacing Stalin. But Lenin was isolated from his Party by the very triumvirs, and by Stalin, whom the TsK had empowered to protect him from visitors - out of concern that he get well soon.

Now Stalin's position was most advantageous in comparison with the other great leaders. So what if their merits were greater, their names more famous. As the near future would show, that was just talk, empty sound. Stalin had real power, connections with thousands of people who controlled life in their various spheres.

Lenin concentrated unbelievable power in the center of the Party and reduced other organs, Soviet and administrative, to the position of simple executors and even powerless attendants. This made way for the future power of the apparat. It was not possible to run the country from the center without a huge bureaucratic machine. And this apparat inevitably turned into the all-powerful master of the country, unchecked by representative institutions, legislative system, or public opinion. It replaced the former Russian bureaucracy and became even more arbitrary. The apparatchik in his office is omnipotent and all-powerful as long as he enjoys the trust of the leadership and keeps his position. The right of appointment and dismissal was strictly centralized in the TsK; as a practical matter it was conducted by the Secretariat headed by Stalin.

The power of appointment placed the Party from top to bottom in the hands of the apparat. No local organization could express its opinion without the knowledge of the higher apparat. The apparatchiki, especially in the middle

levels, depended entirely upon the Secretariat. They were concerned not to contradict it so as not to lose their jobs.

For several more years the annual Party congresses continued to play a certain legislative role. But then the supreme apparatchik, Stalin, worked an important change in the composition of the congresses. Apparatchiki, who had not long before been appointed by him, became the significant majority of delegates. Some interesting documents have been preserved. Stalin wrote the secretaries of provincial committees notes that read approximately: "Kabakov, I ask your support at the congress. Stalin will not forget you." He did not forget. He had them shot.<sup>2</sup>

The domination of the congresses by apparatchiki is well confirmed by official party statistics. The last published statistics about the distribution of delegates by occupation refer to the 13th Congress in May 1924.<sup>3</sup> For following congresses only social origin was reported. Altogether at the 13th Congress there were 748 deputies with voting rights. In the category "machine workers," that is workers by social condition, there were 54 or 7.2% of the total. Those occupied "wholly with Party work" numbered 488 or 65.3%. Within this group only 37 delegates, or 7.6%, were low-ranking Party workers. There were 90 representatives of Soviet institutions, 12%; 51 from unions, 6.8%, 8 of whom were simple workers; 44 from the Red Army, 5.9%; 20 from economic organs, 2.7%; and 1 from a cooperative, 0.1%. That was all. Bureaucrats of various stripes - Party, union, soviets, economic - made up 86.0%. In the highest supposedly representative organ of the proletarian party there was one real worker for each twenty apparatchiki, who had the additional advantage of being better educated, learned, and more verbal. The question who would make decisions at the congress was not raised.



There was also the enormous material differentiation even within the Party. At that time when a worker's monthly income was at the beggarly level of 25 to 30 rubles and often less, communist executives received salaries in the hundreds. The Central Control Commission reported to the congress that some communist officials, bank administrators for example, received up to 1200 rubles per month. The Congress found that unacceptable and set an upper limit of 360 rubles, which was, however, commonly violated.

At earlier congresses pliant voting majorities had taken shape more or less naturally under the influence of Lenin's unquestionable authority and the blindness of the Party masses. Now they were consciously organized. This is where democratic centralism had led Lenin and his closest comrades - to military discipline combined with unrestrained centralization and the unrepresentative nature of the Party organs.

Unlike Stalin, his rivals held revolutionary ideals (this is a statement of fact, not praise) and were confirmed Marxists (which did not prevent them from carrying on a bitter fight about its correct interpretation). They were intellectuals, which meant they were strongly influenced by impersonal, ideological motivations. All of them, with the exception of Trotskii, were intriguers and contrivers but at an amateur level. As intellectuals they were insufficiently pragmatic and were unhealthily impatient of others' ideas. This helped Stalin set them against one another.

This very briefly is the immediate political background in which Stalin appeared. His success in the struggle for power was determined, however, by other deeper historical factors. Stalin's dictatorship, which arose at the end of the twenties, undoubtedly bears the stamp of his personality but in its basic characteristics is a natural continuation of the tendencies and intentions begun by Lenin at the dawn of Soviet power. Those characteristics

are in their turn a result of the centuries-long development of the Russian state, and of the spiritual and material life of the people.

Indisputably Lenin, in team with his younger partner Trotskii, took upon himself a gigantic task of state revolution and the succeeding struggle to hold power. This is his greatness as a revolutionary, as leader of the state and the Party. But there is no doubt that Lenin did not get the state or the social order that he dreamed of but only that which could actually exist in Russian conditions, that were permitted by them.

Military-bureaucratic, obscurantist, bare-foot, servile, downtrodden Russia, as it was on the day before the revolution, could not be transformed overnight. The holders of power changed, some of the facades in the empire of facades were torn down, but the essence remained. People remained the same in their relations with one another, to work, to the legal order, and to freedom. The architects of the new life, although they did not notice it themselves, bore some of the burdens of the old psychology. There were more of the old-regime way of doing things in their behavior than might have been expected from revolutionaries including those of the most extreme persuasion. Then in the thirties and even more so in the forties Stalin would rely on great-power chauvinism and copy the external forms of the former state structure right down to details, to the full dress uniforms and the ranks to go with them.

But from the very beginning Stalin relied on the fossilized traditions of national psychology. For the people the ideal of a leader had always been a dreadful power overlayed with justice. You beat us, but for our own good.

The people have always been ready to accept violence. That the severity, the cruelty usually left little room for justice seemed ordinary and acceptable too. Russian social thought had not yet arrived at the

understanding that the tsars' power retained its godly nature only so long as they ruled through laws and in the interests of their subjects. That concept first developed with tsar Peter. It could happen then that emperors could be murdered by court janissaries but never executed by the people. Charles I of England and Louis XVI of France were immeasurably more humane than the most liberal of our autocrats.

From time immemorial the power of those in authority, the monarch's will, and tradition have all stood higher in the eyes of the people than justice, law, or even religion. Therefore the seizure of power and the possession of its attributes have been the deciding factor in any political, juridical, or even moral issue. Public opinion unhesitatingly justified the victor, the man at the summit of power. If rational or scholastic arguments did not suffice, there were the mysterious considerations known only to the one at the top.

All of this provided exceptionally fertile soil for the growth of a strong personality. The insignificant development of legal consciousness, servile docility, which barely permitted the thought of opposing authority with force, greatly increased the chances such a personality would emerge. It was natural that such a man would be constrained by few ideological or moral limitations. After achieving power, other attributes accrued - the peoples' love, infallible wisdom, the force of history. The Russian people, who have never so much as smelled freedom, are not prone to resist tyrants. They tend rather to sympathize with strong personalities like Ivan IV and remember their evil deeds with masochistic admiration.

All the popular rebellions of Russian history were incited and led by free men on its borders or by aliens. The Cossacks were Russian only by language and religion, not by ethnicity or, most important, by psychology. Even

so-called independent thought, such as that of the schismatics and other religious dissidents, was often stagnant. Oppression is the normal way of Russian life. The yoke of the hateful Mongols is usually said to have lasted 300 years. It was really less, but still more than 150 years. More burdensome serfdom lasted about as long, from the end of the 16th to the middle of the enlightened 19th century. We will not try to judge if these phenomena were the cause or the result of Russians' compliance in the face of oppression.

The Russian people's tendency toward or preparation for democracy underwent a severe test in the months between February and October 1917. The old order had oppressed practically everybody, and they were glad to see it pass. Therefore it collapsed. There was no revolutionary conspiracy or organized movement. Powerless, obsolete, deprived of support, the old regime fell beneath the natural pressure of general dissatisfaction. The revolt was directed not so much against monarchism per se, as against particular parts of its structure, which the autocracy did not understand and was not able to change in time. Military defeat, as it often does, simply displayed the rottenness of the structure and sharpened the discontent. It was also important that the old order was unable to digest the rapid economic growth that continued even during the war. There was one other factor, which is frequently ignored. Tsarism had not only created its organs of power (read violence) but for centuries had been carrying on an exhausting battle with them. The bureaucracy, which had slowly evolved from the Varangian and Mongolian system of "feeding" into commonplace bribery, was not an inconsequential foe. "Russia is governed not by emperor, but by a department chief," Nicholas I once acknowledged.<sup>4</sup>

The apparatus, the bureaucracy, fought with tsarism in its own special interests, but it remained loyal to the form of government. In February 1917 the bureaucracy failed to defend the Romanovs; it had ceased to believe in the form. Tsarism fell.<sup>5</sup> The old bureaucracy lost its power and position. Its intuitive assurance that any succeeding regime would need it was not justified.

We know well from the experience of other countries that toppling a monarchy does not automatically and inescapably lead to the establishment of the people's power. We are aware also of model democracies flourishing under the aegis of kingly authority. Lenin wrote that a revolution cannot only seize power. It must smash the old state machinery and replace it with its own, or the goals of the revolution will not be realized. Before the Russian supporters of democracy there arose a tormenting problem. Everyone understood that it was necessary to remove as quickly as possible those forces which had destroyed tsarism - the old forms of social life and the former structure of relationships. If they succeeded at that, if Russian democracy proved to be strong enough, decisive enough, capable of creative work, then the country at long last could live in a new order, more just and more humane.

Alas! Flesh of one flesh with the people, the democratic community languished for decades waiting for the change, wrote mountains of books, threw a few bombs, but did not manage to acquire any practical preparation for building a new life. The Provisional Government was created not only by the liberals but also by all of the socialists, including the Bolsheviks, all of whom at first feared the return of the autocracy. This organ of the revolution chose a strange way to operate. Instead of meeting the real needs of the nation, it preferred to mark time for eight fateful months waiting for the Constituent Assembly, which was to perform the democratic miracles - that is, to take the burden of responsibility from Kerenskii. Only very naive

people could believe that the Constituent Assembly, which was to meet in conditions of growing hunger and continuing slaughter, could freely choose Russia's future path. The cities hungered for bread, the peasants for land, the soldiers for the end of war. Not many were deeply concerned with the form of government. If the Assembly did not give them what they wanted, they would follow someone who could satisfy their real needs - or was at least willing to promise. Once the decisions of the Assembly of the Land were made, they would have to be carried out immediately.

It cannot be said that once they were in power the liberals, democrats, and socialists did not understand the needs of the time. But they were too used to talking lofty phrases; in the Russian tradition they did not know how to act with the necessary speed and were scared to death of the responsibility. The Provisional Government preferred to mark time. It failed to provide agrarian reform, food supplies, or peace, that is, those basic conditions with which they might have begun to rebuild Russia. The people lost patience, their sympathies drifted left. The untended power was easily seized by the Bolsheviks, the far left of democracy, who immediately established, in part contrary to their own expectations, an extreme right, most despotic form of government.

The Bolsheviks solved two of the greatest problems at once - they gave the land to the peasants and proclaimed peace - thereby strengthening their position. This excellent political gambling won them the whole pot. True, bread soon disappeared entirely, and peace and order (for which even some of the monarchists had supported the Bolsheviks) turned into the bloody chaos of the civil war. It must be admitted, however, that the land did remain the peasants' . . . for all of twelve years . . .

Having pushed out the Provisional Government, the Bolsheviks sat in the old government's armchairs. Yesterday's revolutionaries soon forgot that the people's existence determines consciousness - one of the few reliable tenets of their doctrine. The people were not disturbed that social harmony was achieved by executions and requisitions, that the beautiful building erected in the name of future generations was being raised on the bones of this generation. Insensitive to their own suffering, the people set out with irrepressible determination to realize the dream of their foolish leaders of prosperity for all through obedience. In a short time they had trampled Russia and mangled it more thoroughly than their predecessors had ever dreamed to. In all this Stalin's contribution was entirely ordinary. It is hard even to distinguish him.

Later, after the civil war was won, the Bolsheviks removed a few archaic obstacles, which from sluggishness and laziness the old regime had not cleared from the path of economic development. This without a doubt helped rapid industrialization and the growth of military might. They introduced universal education and liquidated illiteracy, which tsarism had definitely not wanted to do.

Economic successes improved the life of the average citizen, but not nearly as much as might have been expected from such a rapid rate of growth. The omnipotent government gathered in the lion's share of the new wealth for its great-power, imperialistic policies, and to maintain the new, greedy ruling class.

Industrialization progressed one-sidedly. It was oriented toward military and prestige projects. The people's needs were at the bottom of the list. As a result the level of life remained extremely modest, although it gradually improved. For weapons, the most expensive and up-to-date, there was always

money. Countless millions and billions were wasted through theft, improvidence, and ignorant ventures on a huge scale. Finally, collectivization and the ensuing cruel experimentation in the spirit of Swift's learned men led to the collapse of agriculture.

It is time to return to the starting point. Just how much did Stalin's personality influence this history? It is likely, very likely, that Stalin's role is seen mostly in the coloration of specific events, in the appointment and removal (usually destruction) of individuals, however many there were. The general course of history after October could hardly have taken a different course had there been a different person in his place.

All the same the Bolsheviks would have had to muzzle and suppress the opposition with their natural multiplicity of opinions and interests. It was not Stalin who began to do that. The collision between the state, which had seized industry, and the peasantry, which did not want to give up its produce for the needs of industrialization in exchange for primarily immaterial goods, was unavoidable. No one could have taken the peasants' land and property bloodlessly. Repression like that in a peasant country would invariably produce anger, hatred, and repressed aggression. This was the psychological preparation for the terror of 1937-1938. Terror was the constant companion of power, its primary weapon in the battle with its own population from the very first day.

In his concern for personal power Stalin only gave form to this process, but he could not and he did not mean to change its direction. He did not do what he wanted, but what was necessary, and consequently what was possible.

In other words, only those of Stalin's undertakings succeeded, which suited the spirit and level of development of our society, the concrete relations of social forces, the psychological expectations of the people,



their concepts of the personality and policies of a leader. We cannot ignore that even today after the cult of personality has been revealed millions of the simplest people continue to feel deep sympathy for Stalin. In their memories has remained the figure of a great leader, severe and merciless, but with marks of greatness and an inflexible will. A prime component of the nostalgia for Stalin's time is the motif of order. No one denies that that order was expressed not in harmony but rather in general terror and widespread, cruel violence. Nonetheless in reminiscences about that time one hears notes of genuine regret. Explain after that the mysterious Russian soul . . . . 6

It would not be accurate to portray Stalin only as a willful ogre. He was an unprincipled and monstrously amoral person, a wily and perfidious intriguer, a bloody and callous tyrant, ready to do anything for the sake of power. However as a statesman he is distinguished more by shortsightedness, indecisiveness, and inertia, which from time to time gave way to bursting energy during the introduction of idiotic innovations, which were usually abandoned uncompleted.

Stalin certainly did not mean to destroy Russia, though he took it to the brink. He did what he did not from malice or insanity but to keep his hold on power. Like every leader he sincerely wished to see the country prosperous and powerful, the population flourishing. He worked at that too, although he achieved little. That was because the system he headed was not suited to such purposes.

Historical fortune-telling is unreliable. It is hard to see how things would have been had Trotskii or Kamenev or Bukharin run the country. But it seems obvious that any of them would have had to act much as Stalin did. If they did not have the stomach for it, the system would have removed them and put the same tasks before their successors.

This is not said to excuse Stalin. He is responsible, as are we all, for all he did. It is doubly useful then to separate out from the myriad accusations (historical, unfortunately, not criminal) those which relate to Stalin personally and cannot be assigned to the faceless system.

Stalin did not invent terror and mass repression. Methods of terrorization, suppression, destruction and expropriation of large groups of the population were used before he took power.

The red terror was declared after the attempt on Lenin's life in 1918. All of the members of the imperial family were murdered that year. Early in 1918 the Bolsheviks nationalized industry; this was the largest seizure of private property without compensation in Russian history.<sup>7</sup> At the same time they took the apartments and personal property (including libraries and art collections) of the non-proletarian elements.

In 1919 at the direction of the TsK a massive extermination of Cossacks was carried out. During the civil war bourgeois and gentry hostages were routinely shot. Tens of thousands of Vrangel's officers and Greens, who had surrendered under the condition that their lives be spared, were killed in the Crimea in 1921. During the widespread famine in 1921 the government seized church valuables and frequently took reprisals against the clergy. Also in 1921 numerous popular uprisings were brutally crushed, including those at Kronshtadt and in Tambov.

In the early twenties thousands of members of outlawed political parties, bourgeois and socialist, were put in concentration camps and "political isolators". In 1922 the Cheka exiled from the country a large group of prominent intellectuals.

Repressions were already normal when Stalin came to power. Even depriving the peasants of land - collectivization - cannot be blamed entirely on him.

The Bolsheviks had always wanted to socialize the land, which in practice meant state ownership. The decree on land had been forced on them by circumstances. It was a tactical measure to take the steam out of the SRs' political program, and it succeeded in attracting soldiers and peasants away from what had been the most influential party of the time. During the civil war, without touching the land, which there was no one to work except the peasants, the Soviet authorities took most of its harvest (requisitioning). Only the threat of a national peasant uprising forced them to abandon that policy and to introduce NEP. During the 1920s they tolerated the peasants as the only producers of grain, but the contradiction, the incompatibility, the "scissors" between state-owned industry and privately owned agriculture was always a problem waiting on the agenda. In a totalitarian state the situation was an anomaly and could not be permitted to go on forever.

When capital was needed for industrialization (primary accumulation), the peasantry was the only class of the population from whom it could be taken. The property of others had already been expropriated. The main result of collectivization was the transfer of land to the unshared ownership of the state. Collective farms were a screen, a palliative, an intermediate form, which naturally were gradually abandoned. So what if grain production fell at first. What there was went directly to the state, which no longer had to depend on the vagaries of the market and could pay the farmers as little as it liked. Now the harvest could be employed for the highest purposes. Stalin proved to be more inventive than Lenin; he very sensibly figured that there was no need to rely on requisitions, which had always been accompanied by excesses and anxiety, if the state just once would seize the source. There was famine in the country, but the greater part of the wheat harvest was

exported. Equipment for new construction was purchased with the hard-earned foreign currency.

It was not as important to join the peasants together for cooperative work as it was, having taken their land to turn them into laborers or serfs. Full legal enslavement was unnecessary, but something similar was done. Residents of most rural areas were deprived of their internal passports and thereby of the right to move. Having lost their land, the peasants were no longer economically independent.<sup>8</sup> In the name of these state purposes the most productive agriculturalists, that is the kulaks, were removed - killed or exiled - just as ten years earlier the captains of industry were dispossessed and routed. Stalin later admitted to Churchill that collectivization had cost ten million lives.<sup>9</sup>

The naive younger generations have the right to ask: wasn't it possible to take the land without killing the kulaks? Unfortunately that was impossible. Stalin's report to the 17th Party Congress contains figures which help us assess the scale of that historical necessity. In 1932 industry produced altogether 51,000 tractors. At that time there were 217,000 collective farms (kolkhozy). In the next year there were 224,500 kolkhozes but only 204,000 actual tractors. The Machine Tractor Stations serving the kolkhozes had only 122,300 tractors or  $\frac{122,300}{224,500} = 0.54$  tractors per kolkhoz.

The slogan "to put the USSR in a car, and the peasant on a tractor" belonged to the future long after collectivization was carried out. Still the authorities had to be concerned for the material basis of the kolkhozes. Most of the stock and equipment for them was expropriated from the kulaks. The frightened middling peasants, weening copiously, turned over their modest belongings, too; it would have been dangerously easy otherwise to be taken for

a kulak. True, they slaughtered a significant part of their livestock in the process, to eat well one last time.

Soviet writers and artists have invariably depicted the kulak as a grizzly, brutal man with a sawed-off shotgun for killing kolkhoz activists in one hand and a torch for burning the kolkhoz buildings in the other. Probably collectivization could not have been accomplished without the violence. The kulaks fought not collectivization as a process, however, but the kolkhozes themselves, which were being established with their property.

The rural poor joined the kolkhozes without particular coercion, often quite willingly, but they brought to them only their hungry mouths and their inability and unwillingness to work. They were attracted to collectivization by the share, up to a third, they received of the property confiscated from the kulaks. By ascribing the well-to-do peasants to the kulak category, the basest social instincts were appealed to and enthusiasm for collectivization was fanned.

In his greatest acts affecting the national economy Stalin did nothing original. He simply carried existing policies to their logical conclusions. Having said that, it would be unjust to deprive him of author's rights for the innovations which he really did devise and realize.

Stalin was the first to so widely apply political and judicial repression in the struggle for power within the Party. Millions of Bolsheviks, including practically all the old revolutionaries, became objects of repression. The bloody war among groups and individuals for control of the ruling Party led to the complete destruction of governmental and state institutions. Even the army did not escape, although it stood outside the main battles and reliably supported the party against the country.

The unrestrained violence that the Bolsheviks constantly directed against the population finally boomeranged. The nation's history had prepared the people for it, but still it was not entirely natural. It was carried out by people, various people, many people. Stalin was producer and director.

Even if we accept the existence of historical predestination, still every statesman, every man in general, has choice (free will): to be a weapon of the inevitable or not. Every historical inevitability is the sum many factors and processes, not the strict determinism characteristic of geological and physical phenomena. Acts are committed by people. The system, the political order only creates the conditions and stimulations in which they act.

Stalin sooner and better than the other leaders of the twenties recognized that in the current situation only power was valuable: not choosing the correct line in politics, or successfully pursuing it, just power. In a totalitarian dictatorship it is easy enough to present any results in a good light. The greater part of the population will not protest but will believe the proffered interpretation. A monopoly of the information media permits failure to be called unheard-of success; theft - incomparable charity; slavery - the highest form of freedom; mass murders and concentration camps - feats of a new, perfect humanism.

The hostile opposition of the ruling class to the people, combined with the customs of collective responsibility and mutual protection made the whole structure of power permanently unstable. The personal struggle for positions of leadership within this instability from time to time resulted in large-scale dismissals. Stalin's greatness consists precisely in this unleashing of enormous repressions, in the adaptation of the structure of the state and society, of the whole life of the country to this task. This was

his historical role. This is his contribution to the art of state administration.

There were appreciable differences in the external staging of the repressions. The opposition were dismissed to the accompaniment of deafening propaganda. Stalinists were destroyed just as mercilessly, but silently and privately. Sometimes after their murder, either normal or medical, the victims' names remained in the calendar of saints: Kirov, Ordzhonikidze, in all probability Kuibyshev, Gor'kii, Menzhinskii, Zhdanov, Scherbakov, in an earlier period Frunze and Dzerzhinskii. Others departed life quietly - condemned by secret courts, shot without a trial, or sent to languish in prison - and passed into official oblivion: Postyshev, Kosior, Eikhe, Unshlikht, Ezhov, Voznesenskii, Kuznetsov . . . Members of the two groups are related by their relative independence and their personal popularity. Whether or not they were later included in official histories often depended on the degree of their popularity.

A similar situation occurred in relation to figures of the Red Army. First the most talented and independent thinkers among the commanders were executed and loudly defamed (in that order): Iakir, Tukhachevskii, Uborevich, Fel'dman, Primakov, and others. Then the more backward and mediocre officers, who had been forced to become accessories and accomplices of the crime, quietly disappeared from the scene: Bliukher, Dybenko, Kashirin, and many others.

Beginning with the 16th Congress in 1930 the Party and the country experienced a new type of leadership. Before there had been coalitions of groups. Now there was the great leader and his cohorts. For the most part these were people of the second water, the minor figures of the revolution, who while Lenin was alive could not even dream of holding key positions. They

were devoted to Stalin, energetic, unprincipled, and faceless. This last quality permitted gradation. Those who possessed more personality than the others, the brightest of the colorless - Kirov, Ordzhonikidze - had the least chance of staying in the saddle. The exception was the colorful Kaganovich, who possessed boundless energy, an iron grip, and outstanding organizational talents, which unfortunately he used too often not in the people's interests. Possibly Stalin kept him for his deep personal devotion, which was not shaken by the repression of his two brothers. For any of Stalin's cohort suspicion of intellectualism was the worst insult.

All his life Stalin remained a professional conspirator. Therefore within the group of leaders he gathered, who were rather servile and fawning, there always operated a small, isolated nucleus. This nucleus not only controlled the planning of policy and of its execution, but its members also continuously conspired against the other leaders, and at the proper moment crushed them.

At first Molotov and Kaganovich made up this nucleus with Stalin, and the operational headquarters, that is the Secretariat, comprised Malenkov, Ezhov, Poskrebyshev, Tovstukha, and Mekhlis. Most of these shady characters became very important men, except for Tovstukha who died young of tuberculosis. Voroshilov was close to this privy council, but he never became a member. And there were many others who always remained outside: important dignitaries like Ordzhonikidze, Postyshev, Rudzutak, Kirov, Kuibyshev, and Iagoda; powerless supernumeraries like Kalinin; and special envoys like Mikoian. The nucleus gathered enormous power to itself. All the questions which were submitted to plenums and congresses were first discussed and decided at meetings of this narrow group. Malenkov, who was responsible for cadre, kept a card file on almost every member of the party.



The composition of the nucleus changed with time. Ezhov, who worked overtime in the period of the repressions and came to embody them, became expendable. He was replaced by Beria. Malenkov came to occupy a leading place. Zhdanov and Shcherbakov, the ideologist of antisemitism, became part of the group.

Within Stalin's staff there was another battle. From the beginning of the war Malenkov and Beria gained influence at the expense of "the old men". At the end of the forties this pair with the cooperation or connivance of Stalin got rid of Zhdanov and his supporters ("the Leningrad affair"). At the 19th Congress Malenkov assumed significant power over the party apparatus that had been Stalin's. Sick, and having suffered two insults, Stalin tried to regain the initiative by playing up the "doctors' plot". The whole Stalinist guard now came under attack. Stalin began to press them on all fronts, hoping to replace them with new people (by expanding the Presidium of the TsK).

But the old guard had studied too well under the master and knew his habits. In the face of a common threat they ceased their feuding and joined together. Beria and Malenkov worked with Molotov, Kaganovich, and Khrushchev, a protege of Stalin and a member of the Politbiuro, but not a member of the nucleus. Stalin died just in time. There is much to suggest that the conspirators poisoned the Father of the People in the best Stalinist style. In any case on the day after his death they restructured all the organs of power, that is, they accomplished a coup d'etat.

To better understand the nature and genesis of the Stalin phenomenon it is useful to draw an analogy with a Russian classic. It has long been noted that Dostoevskii's penetrating mind saw more in post-reform nihilism, and its concrete expression - the Nechaevshchina, than was yet there when he wrote The Possessed. That prophetic novel was a successful description of the future

psychology of that particular environment in which the microbiological culture of 20th century revolution grew.<sup>10</sup>

It does not require much imagination to say that Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin strongly resembles Peter Stepanovich Verkhovenski. <sup>11</sup> One can see similarities of psychological traits and value systems from which arise similarities of behavior.

The younger Verkhovenski needed nothing in life except power over people, and not just some power but absolute power. So it was with Stalin. The technical difference between them was that the literary character had to explain himself in monologs, or readers would not understand him, but Stalin had to be silent, otherwise he would be discovered. Neither of them had ideas - about transforming the world, for example - as Zheliabov and Lenin had.

Their guiding idea was power. Other ideas and whole ideologies were only means to dominance. World dominance. Verkhovenski dreamt of subjugating the planet. His weapon - the gloomy, detailed, and alas realizable (we were convinced) utopian system of Shigalev ("He was a genius like Fourier, but bolder than Fourier, and stronger than Fourier.")<sup>12</sup> The cover was the figure of the Roman pope. "All that is needed is that the International agree," he said and immediately added optimistically, "It will happen." Dzhugashvili, the expelled seminarist, chose as his weapon another not very different utopia. The analogy stretches further. To achieve domination of the planet, the great leader of the world proletariat was prepared to ally himself to the pope, not the Roman pope, true, but the fascist. On November 25, 1940 I. V. Stalin, a member of the Russian section of the Communist International, telegraphed Berlin his agreement to enter the tripartite (anti-Comintern) pact. It was not his fault that the deal did not last. Like his literary prototype he wanted it to.

Other traits coincide closely: cunning, perfidy, guile, inventiveness and indiscrimination in the selection of means, tendency to intrigue, purposefulness, and colossal energy. Neither was Stalin squeamish about murder, not to mention pseudojuridical executions. When it was useful, he employed criminals. He was like that as a youth - it would seem he was not expelled from the seminary for his politics. Criminals participated in the robbery of the Tiflis bank and in others of Stalin's expropriations. Their tracks are clear in the murder of V. M. Bekhterev. Later, when he had reached the pinnacle of power, criminals became superfluous. More powerful means were found.

Like Petr Stepanovich, Stalin highly regarded the utilitarian value of ideology and organization. This brings us to the Shigalevshchina. Shigalev's social program grew from the discord between his personality and his environment. As a thoughtful, but barely educated, and impatient young man he was offended by the disorderliness of Russia. Socialist literature offered him an ideal ordering of life on rational, scientific, and just grounds. But the more he juxtaposed his models to the loathsomeness of the real world, his sterling people of the future to his contemporaries, the better he understood the infeasibility, the chimerical nature of all those phalansteries, communes, and Cities of the Sun. Listen:

Having devoted my energy to studying the question of the social organization of future society, which will replace this, I have reached the conclusion that all creators of social systems from ancient times to our 187- . . . were dreamers, fable tellers, and fools, who contradicted themselves, who understood nothing of natural science including that strange creature called man. But since a

future social structure is needed right now, when we are all ready to act, so as not to meditate any longer I offer my own system . . . I announce beforehand that my system is not complete . . . I got lost in my facts, and my conclusion directly contradicts the ideas from which I began. Starting from unlimited freedom, I conclude with unlimited despotism. I will add, however, that there can be no other solution of the social formula than my own.<sup>13</sup>

At this point readers will be laughing, but in vain. Shigalev is not the worst dialectician. He is not the first thinker whose conclusions contradict his first premises, or more precisely whose means deny the end he wishes to reach. In Shigalev that happens in thought: for some others in practice.

Shigalev's system is comprehensive. In the novel he allots ten nights for its explication. But the basic idea is clear: one tenth of mankind receives absolute authority over the rest, who

must lose their personality and become like a herd and through perfect obedience achieve rebirth of original innocence, as in primeval paradise; however, they will work.<sup>14</sup>

This seems very familiar, although not in those words. The dictatorship of the proletariat, in Russia a dictatorship by fewer than two million in a population of over 150 million. The classless society, where true equality reigns. The socialistic education of the masses, creation of the new man. And of course, he who does not work does not eat.

The Shigalevshchina anticipated the actual temper of the Russian Bolshevik version of Marxism, which took almost as much from Blanc and Nechaev as from Marx and Engels. When they seized power, they were inspired by the strong and

sincere conviction that a small socialist avant-grade (party) could in short order transform the life and psychology of the people, could lead them to socialist paradise, which because of their backwardness they did not yet perceive. They put no limits on the means they would use to achieve their goal. In the words of the poet, Korzhavin:

Just a little pressure more  
and to man's damnation an end.  
The last skirmish, the last battle,  
No pity for foe nor friend.<sup>15</sup>

We could continue the comparison, but there is something more interesting. With the coming of the Bolsheviks to power a boundless horizon was opened to the impetuous proponents of Shigalev's ideas. With astonishing speed they created their own theories and schemes, clothed them in Marxist terminology, and with the support of the dictatorship set to work. The whole country, all aspects of life, became fair game for unthinking, fantastic experiments. We tend to remember the cultural and scientific madness, but there were others even worse. Here are a few examples taken at random.

Immediately after October socialism was declared with the confiscation of bourgeois property and equal pay (almost) for any work. A little later when there was nothing to eat, equality was replaced at one swoop with a hierarchy of rations with fifteen categories. As it turned out the principles of privileged allocation of goods was very tenacious. For a long time the calendar was tinkered with: there were five- and six-day weeks, years without weeks or months. In the schools loose-leaf texts were used, students were taught in brigades, nature was transformed beyond recognition. There were endless campaigns, movements, initiatives . . .

Social sciences in the country suffered terribly. Soon there were neither sociologists nor economists in the normal professional sense. The same was true of historians. In literary studies vulgar socialist realism raged; in linguistics, Marr's theory of the labor origins of language. Enthusiasts of the new theater won a monopoly for themselves and closed such harmful establishments as the Bolshoi and the Mariinskii and other theaters as well. New artists and sculptors demanded the near abolition of other styles.

RAPP conducted a crusade to make literature an organized productive process - and not without success. Futurists, just like Turgenev's Bazarov, called for the destruction of the classical heritage, to free space for truly socialist literature. This was less successful, but there were some outstanding examples of vandalism. A certain tall poet, who could not yet have known that after his death Stalin would call him the most talented poet of the era, arrayed himself in a yellow jacket and led his compatriots in smearing Pushkin's statue in shit.<sup>16</sup> Enough examples.

Stalin took over the country at the height of its Shigalevian daring. He was a conservative man. Strict authority, inspired servility, selfless obedience - these were his ideals. He was constitutionally unable to like the fevered and frenzied innovation. But as a clever, sober politician he was wise enough not to buck the current. Stalin preferred to live and rule in a Shigalevian atmosphere - and it worked out all right for him. In the bedlam it was easier to grasp and expand power. Therefore, for the time being he remained outwardly tolerant of phenomena he could not help but regard with utter distaste.

Only when his position was unassailable did he begin to tame the cultural wilds, which were no longer needed. In every field an idol of indisputable authority was set up. Again it worked out all right. The frantic

restlessness came to a full stop. This was especially apparent in the sciences that up to then had been allowed to operate independently: genetics, agrobiolgy, psychology, physiology, cybernetics. It would be superfluous to speak of literature and art again. From time to time in accordance with the Shigalev blueprints convulsions were arranged: the struggle with servility, the pogrom of geneticists, the revolution in language studies, etc.

The convulsion holds a special place in Shigalev's system. Stalin not only adopted that part of his teaching but developed it extensively. This is what Verkhovenskiï had to say about it:

Slaves must have masters. Complete obedience, complete loss of personality. But every thirty years Shigalev allows a convulsion, and they all begin to eat one another, for the most part just to chase boredom. Boredom is an aristocratic sensation. In Shigalev's system there will be no desires. We can have desires and suffering. Slaves will have the Shigalevshchina.<sup>17</sup>

He could hardly help liking the general idea, but it needed elaboration. Boredom was an unimportant factor for Stalin, and he never felt a personal need for suffering. The convulsions were unleashed not as emotional prophylaxis for the workers and peasants. They became a regular means for strengthening the tyranny.

This is not a contradiction. The system created the conditions for millions of convulsions, but the Stalinists took it upon themselves to give them universal scope. Otherwise the little rumblings might have come to nothing or been vented in modest, useless explosions.

Here we end our comparison with Dostoevskii's famous novel, although we have not exhausted its possibilities. Our aim has not been so much to work out the analogy in detail, as to indicate the potential.





## Chapter 14

### Attack on Headquarters

Having gained important strategic positions, Stalin and Voroshilov engaged in one more action to fortify their success-- this time an open attack on the Red Army cadre. In 1930 the organs of the NKVD arrested a large group of prominent military specialists, who had served in the old army. Among them were generals and colonels of the tsarist General Staff, all of whom had participated in the civil war on the Soviet side. At the time of their arrest most of the specialists were professors at higher military schools. Here is a partial list: A. A. Svechin and A. E. Snegarev, already known to us. Snegarev had been awarded a Hero of Labor medal at the 10th anniversary of October. The former war minister of the Provisional government A. I. Verkhovskii; former chief of staff of the Eastern Front Ol'derogge; former chief of staff of the 4th Army and the Turkish Front Baltiiskii; chief of engineers and hero of the Crimean crossing A. D. Malevskii; also the well-known military writers and teachers B. K. Verkhovskii, Bazarevskii, Besiadvorskii, Vysotskii, Kolegov, A. G. Lignau, S. I. Lukirskii, Mikheev, Dolivo-Dobrovolskii, Golubintsev, Sapozhnikov, Seger, Rants, Sokolov, Suvorov, V. G. Sukhov, V. N. Egor'ev, and many many others--honored, authoritative, respected, decorated.

The interrogations yielded little, as not everyone was yet ready to confess to things they had not done. But on the other hand, the NKVD had already learned that innocence was not grounds for discharge. They were sent to camps in the Leningrad region. In the spring of 1932 those who had survived the healthful lumbering were freed and returned to their former posts. A few were later permitted to teach at the new Academy of the General

Staff, Svechin and A. Verkhovskii, for example. A few remained outside the army--Egor'ev, B. Verkhovskii, Snegarev. Despite their subsequent liberation, the blow to the army was serious. A. I. Todorskii, in a review in the form of an historical essay, which we have already cited, wrote of the arrested professors:

. . . these men were the real flower of the old army in the most positive sense, and I would say to a certain extent the flower of the Red Army. They became part of it, flesh and blood, and were as proud of it as of their own army . . .

By that time all the old generals and higher officers without exception had adjusted fully to Soviet conditions and justly considered themselves active participants in building the new world, insasmuch as they had all been in the civil war and served the RKKA, and service in the Red Army was in itself considered especially honorable.

We offer another quotation from Todorskii's work. It is especially valuable as it is the only written testimony of an eyewitness.

This glaring lawlessness expresses the traditional approach of Stalin and Voroshilov to military specialists, which was apparent from the beginning of the civil war. I especially remember those tragic days of 1930 when the grief-stricken wives and children of the arrested men rushed for protection to People's Commissar Voroshilov, who without bothering to look into their petitions sent them to me as chief of UVUZ (Administration of military education institutions--authors) what could I do--one of many chiefs of central administrations, when the arrests had been carried out at

the orders of Stalin and with the sanction of Voroshilov?  
My appeals to the then assistant people's commissar of  
internal affairs, my good acquaintance comrade Messing did  
no good.<sup>1</sup>

This is how Todorskii, a Bolshevik from a poor peasant background, appraises the actions of Stalin's leadership. Strictly speaking, practically nothing was known about the charges against the men. It was whispered that these old men comprised a monarchistic conspiracy. They hoped, we would have to assume, that they could find the strength to break the power of the Red Army and the NKVD.

Nonetheless some came to believe in the generals' plot. For example the former nobleman and lieutenant Mikhail Tukhachevskii not only accepted the Stalin-Voroshilov version, but gave it a military-scientific basis. Today at an historical distance it does not appear credible. We have gotten used to the fact that without exception in all the memoirs published since Tukhachevskii's posthumous rehabilitation he has been depicted as the embodiment of an angel.

Alas. You cannot take the words out of history any more than you can from songs. On April 25, 1931 at the Leningrad branch of the Communist Academy an open meeting of the plenum of the section for the study of problems of war took place. The stenographic notes of that scholarly meeting were published as a brochure.<sup>2</sup> Discussion is a normal part of scholarly life, but this one was given particular piquancy by the circumstance that it was conducted in the absence and against the will of a silent opponent. Svechin was called professor only from hypocritical convenience. He was at the time a common camp prisoner who with his academic colleagues was felling trees for the glory

of the five-year plan. As is usual in Soviet discussions, all the speakers held the same opinion.

The first and main report was Tukhachevskii's "On the Strategic Views of Svechin." Tubs of hatred and lies were dumped on the defenseless opponent. Tukhachevskii proved himself an apt pupil of his great leader and his commissar in the art of misrepresenting others' views and falsifying facts. We will turn to the text of his report.

At first, Tukhachevskii noted, as chief of the general staff Svechin fought the Germans willingly, but," ...from the beginning of the civil war he actively participated in nothing. He worked at the Military Academy...His articles, we see, are of an embittered nature and anti-Soviet content."<sup>3</sup> Remember, reader, at the height of the civil war there reigned such freedom in Soviet territory (the city of Moscow and not much else) that a former tsarist general could with impunity severely criticize Soviet authority in print and still remain in its service. It took ten years of intensive Marxist analysis to divine the true purport of these articles. Tukhachevskii continues:

Svechin saw the commissars of the Red Army as a basic hindrance to the work of commanders:

. . . every efficient [commander] trying to concentrate on his work is besieged by a swarm of counselors, planners, delegates, committees, busybodies of every sort and rank, blocking his way, taking credit for his work, usurping his authority.

Interesting that commissars are not mentioned in the quote. Maybe the word counselor (sovetchik) seemed politically suspicious to Tukhachevskii? To be serious again, Tukhachevskii found more and more negative characteristics

in the old general: "Svechin regarded political work with scorn and hostility . . . Svechin never was and never wanted to be a Marxist." That was foolish enough, but there was worse to come. In 1919 Svechin had made bold to announce: "White, gray, or red army--that is a matter of the taste of the organizers of the armed forces. A red militia, however, is as probable as red bread."

His thought was unorthodox, but it would seem that the old man was closer to the truth than his accuser. Why else explain that Tukhachevskii himself, a progressive from the time he was in diapers, heroically defended tsarism in the ranks of the old army for three years, shoulder to shoulder with millions of simple people who later transferred to the Red Army? Unquestioning subordination, without which no army exists, makes it an obedient weapon of its command. Was the Red Army used only for missions of liberation?

Tukhachevskii's wrath was aroused by Svechin's assertion that the strategy of both sides in the civil war differed little because they shared "...a common basis of starvation, poverty, destroyed transport, a peasantry tired of war and avoiding conscription." From this there came "...a certain coincidence of the basic strategic line of the Reds and Whites. Denkin's march on Moscow in 1919 had its continuation in the Reds' march on Warsaw in 1920." This offended Tukhachevskii personally. He sought support in a quote from Lenin: "...just a few more days of the Red Army's victorious offensive and not only would Warsaw have been taken (that would not have been so important), but the Versailles treaty would have been destroyed ..."

He does not mention, however, that even Lenin acknowledged that the assault on Warsaw was a political mistake. That scoundrel Svechin meanwhile had the nerve to write, "The red armies, as if ignoring the material forces of the Poles...went to battle with the Versailles treaty. That is mysticism,

especially in the conditions of [the strategy of] destruction." Svechin believed in the universality of military science, its independence from politics and ideology: "We investigate war with all its possibilities and do not try to narrow our theory to a sketch of a Red Soviet strategic doctrine." Therefore, Tukhachevskii logically concluded, "Svechin did not write his Strategy to prepare the victory of the Red Army. On the contrary, the essence of Svechin's Strategy is defeatist when applied to the USSR."

Tukhachevskii never did fully understand Svechin's main idea--about the decisive role of strategic defense in modern war. Only small or weak countries, which do not have sufficient resources but which want to or are forced to make war, need gamble on destruction. Five years earlier Svechin had predicted that blitzkrieg would have little success in a large war:

An assault of the destructive style places the attacking army in very unfavorable material conditions. It so weakens the defense of their flanks and rear, and demands such efforts at supply, that only by winning signal operational victories can eventual defeat be prevented.<sup>4</sup>

Surely Tukhachevskii experienced that in full measure during the Warsaw operation. Hitler's armies offered a more obvious illustration as they raced toward Moscow and the Southeast.

In truth, he did not know what he was talking about. His general evaluation of Svechin's strategy sounds malicious and abusive; it was a political denunciation, slander: "Svechin's theory of 'attrition' as applied to the USSR becomes . . . a defense of imperialism against the offensive of the proletarian revolution."

Touching on economic questions in passing, Tukhachevskii found further cause to kick the disgraced professor, who was not particularly impressed by

the wonders of the five-year plan: "It would be a crude error, a cruel omission to forget about the huge virgin spaces, in which Dneprostroi and the future Nizhnyi Novgorod automobile plant appear drops in the bucket."

Of course the old general slightly oversalted his skepticism, but a good deal less than others exaggerated their dutiful optimism. It is not hard to see that he was only asking for care in evaluating our economic potential. Tukhachevskii was not up to his subtlety. The end of his report is surprising in its theoretical profundity:

In developing military theory it is of prime importance to be properly armed with the Marxist-Leninist method, and in light of this cleansing our military thought of all Svechinist effluvia is a question of paramount and immediate importance.

At the meeting Svechin was gouged and flayed from all sides. According to the many speakers he was a terrible military historian (K. Bocharov), his methodology was all wrong (I. Slutskii), his operational views were faulty (A. Sediakin). Svechin did not understand the nature of future war (P. Suslov), or the role of the navy (I. Duplitskii). His views on the mobilization of industry in war time were pure treachery (V. Dunaevskii).<sup>5</sup> It was not possible to say anything positive about the man's politics (I. Fendel') or his relations with the Red Army (I. Gazukin). As hard as they tried . . .

Svechin did have a terrible defect. He did not take the trouble to camouflage his words. He did not conform and was careless enough to speak the naked truth. At the Academy he was unflinchingly strict with his students and did not tire of saying that the enemy would not bother to consult the ABC of Communism. Nor would he give preference to anyone for his proletarian heritage, political literacy or progressive views. For this the best Russian

military theorist of the post-revolutionary period was thrown in a prison camp and publicly defamed.

It remains to make a few, but bitter, conclusions. The revolution deprived Tukhachevskii not only of officer's rank (which had not yet been reintroduced in 1931), but also of the conception of military honor. It takes neither much intelligence or conscience to perceive the dishonor of slandering a man with a gag in his mouth and his hands tied behind his back. That was how, by degrees, a moral climate hospitable to terror was established in the army. Can we be surprised that not long after that commanders selected by a tyrant would send their comrades-in-arms to their deaths, although they did not believe in their guilt. And they themselves would go to the torture chambers followed by the taunts of their successors.



## Chapter 15

### A Brief Flowering

Sudden, sharp turns at the helm of the ship of state are normal in Russian history. In 1930 for the second time Stalin scornfully rejected Tukhachevskii's appeal to arm the Red Army with modern technology, which would require the creation of a defense industry. But in May 1931 Tukhachevskii was appointed Deputy People's Commissar and Chief of Armaments for the RKKA. This happened immediately after his shameful participation in the slandering of Svechin and as if to reward him for his devotion to the leadership. The reasons probably lie deeper. A new chapter opened in the history of the Red Army - the most glorious in its short twenty years of existence.

Signs of a major change were visible in the summer of 1930 at the 16th Party congress. Stalin, who was distracted by the attacks on the rightists and the report on kolkhoz construction, ignored questions of defense in his own report. On the other hand, Voroshilov's speech in the discussion which followed was notable for its unconcealed alarm. Of course the Chairman of the RVS USSR approached his task like a true Bolshevik. He spoke in Aesopian language, but for the initiated his message came through rather eloquently.

Voroshilov began at a distance and in broad strokes daubed a picture of the condition of the western armies. The imperialists were intensifying the mechanization of their armed forces and increasing their fire power. The number of their tanks, planes, cars, and heavy guns was increasing with frightening speed. He attached special importance to the quality of military technology. Preparation for war was becoming total:

A country, its economy as a whole - industry, agriculture and transport, its cultural institutions and its

scientific forces - these are the elements being used to prepare for cruel future struggles.<sup>1</sup>

All of this was correct and intelligent, and others, in particular Tukhachevskii and Triandafillov, has said the same two or three years earlier.

Now it would have been natural to turn to internal matters and discuss the condition of the technical armaments of the Red Army. But such consistency and candor would not have been normal for a Stalinist politician. It was said by a delegate to the congress that ". . . the armed forces of our Union are organizationally, militarily, and politically a reliable armed buttress of the dictatorship of the proletariat." As proof Voroshilov produced figures on the social composition of the RKKA: workers and field laborers made up 33%, and peasants 58%. The officer corps was composed 30% of workers, 51% of Party members. What of the old officers, that thorn in the side of the left opposition and a constant object of attack? They were practically all Party members, and they were only 10% of the command cadre. The main thing was that in the two years between the 15th and 16th Congresses the number of communists in the army had grown from 82,000 to 129,000.

All of this gave great hope and even confidence. But the commissar did not stop there. Mentioning that many military questions had passed through the TsK and the Politbiuro in the past two years, he suddenly let fall, "But decisions are one thing and acting on them is something completely different." He had no complaints about the TsK or the government, ". . . but our military industry and industry as a whole, as far as supplying the military with everything it needs is concerned, falls down pretty seriously both in quantity and in quality."

The accusation was serious. Worse than that, despite the polite disclaimer it was directed right at the higher leadership. As if he sensed

the contradiction, the commissar promised, "I will speak to these problems in response to comrade Kuibyshev's report, and I will have some unpleasant words for our industry."

Kuibyshev's report was almost flippant. It was sprinkled with promises about growth and progress, the more important of which in coal and metals were not even half fulfilled. The needs of the army were not mentioned.<sup>2</sup> Voroshilov did not respond to Kuibyshev as he said he would; at least no speech or even mention of a speech appears in the stenographic report. Yet everything was not just smoothed over. The director of the shipbuilding industry, R. Muklevich took up the cudgels.

He began by saying that in Kuibyshev's speech the general tasks of industry "were outlined concretely, and reinforced by facts and figures." (There were more than enough figures, but as far as the facts were concerned, they were, as we say in our newspapers, unconfirmed. We will speak of that in the chapter on the 17th Congress.) Unfortunately, Muklevich continued:

. . . questions of defense, the importance of industry for defense are depicted with too large strokes. We must speak about these tasks because under the screen of secrecy in some places, in factories, and often in higher institutions, nothing is being done.<sup>3</sup>

So, that particular variety of native Soviety tufta flourished back then. The reproach that time was thrown right in the face of higher authority. It was little enough that Muklevich accused them of ignorance about military economy: "There is a conviction that the growth of industry will automatically strengthen the defense capabilities of the army. That is not entirely true." He explained further that he did not only mean work to increase military reserves, but also the working out of a plan to quickly put

industry on a war footing, and repeated, "The simple interchangeability of non-military and war industry, which many people assume, does not exist."

Among the many who did not understand was Stalin, who did not fully appreciate this elementary truth until the war. Muklevich kept his speech exceptionally dry and business-like. He had no use for praise and congratulations for the standard successes. Near the end of his speech he pushed Stalin's nose into the problem once more. "Attention to military problems in our industry is minimal. Necessary preparation for defense is not being carried out."

Kuibyshev did not accept Muklevich's challenge. In his concluding speech he left these serious accusations unanswered. If Budennyi's stupid remarks<sup>4</sup> are overlooked, the problem of defense was not raised again at the 16th congress.

It is evident from Voroshilov's sortie that even before the congress someone was applying serious pressure on the Stalinist leadership to review the state of defense and the army. It is difficult to identify all the people who were raising these questions, but some of them stand out clearly. The pressure was applied in two directions. The first was associated with the technical equipping of the army and the creation of a defense industry. At the highest levels it was represented by Tukhachevskii, Triandafillov, Muklevich, Alksnis, Khalepskii.

The second group encouraged building a line of strategic fortifications along the western and southern borders, similar to those being erected in Germany, France, and Finland. We do not know precisely who was involved in this group, but most probably it included Iakir, who had returned from studying in Germany, Uborevich, Garmarnik, and also several members of the

TsK, who were then involved in civilian work but still had some influence in military affairs - particularly Khataevich.

These were two separate groups, although several years later they did join forces. Tangential evidence for that is Triandafillov's book The Nature of Operations of Modern Armies<sup>5</sup> (1929), which served as a manifesto for Tukhachevskii and his supporters. The book zealously defends the concept of a mechanized army and expounds the principles of sequential operations, from which the theory of "deep" offenses was derived. It did not say a single word about the advisability of erecting strategic fortifications. This is not surprising. Tukhachevskii's team at that time much preferred an offensive strategy.<sup>6</sup> They remained faithful to that idea later but in a somewhat milder form.

Stalin, Voroshilov, and their old pal Egorov, chief of staff of the RKKA, were not men to make subtle distinctions. Both groups' views were alien to them. They planned to fight simply - with saber and rifle. And of course to attack. Theoretical considerations of specialists could not convince them any more than other intellectuals' ramblings could. At that time Stalin was being proclaimed the greatest strategist of the civil war, and the other two were his closest comrades-in-arms. Together with Budennyi they thought themselves strong enough to conquer any enemy. Only changes in the military and political situation in Europe, the example of other countries' armies, and the growing influence of the fascists in Germany forced them to retreat.

Because the new course was taken unwillingly and under great pressure, it was not smoothly carried out. Side by side with the innovators in command post sat dyed-in-the-wool conservatives who considered the changes superfluous, almost capricious in the way they reflected foreign practices. People's Commissar Voroshilov spun like a weathervane, attracted first to one

and then to the other. Chief of Staff Egorov tended to conservatism. As before the role of the major strike forces was given to the cavalry. Cavalrymen like Budennyi and Gorodovikov enjoyed enormous influence. They did not tire of asserting that tanks could not replace horses, if only because Russia lacked roads. There were a number of zealous veterans who would sooner believe an old-regime sergeant major than any military professor. They had fought bravely in the civil war. In peace time they thought all a Red Armyman needed was a dashing appearance, knowledge of the manual of arms, a precise marching step. In this spirit musters and parades, so very dear to Bliukher's heart, were held.

Nonetheless the new course slowly but surely became a reality. New men little liked by Voroshilov and Stalin had to be admitted to the leadership ranks of the RKKA. Ia. B. Gamarnik, an independent and decisive man and a proponent of progressive views, became First Deputy People's Commissar and Chairman of the RVS USSR. He headed the Central Political Department (GlavPUR). Tukhachevskii assumed the post of Second Deputy and Chief of Armaments. The only professional military man in the leading troika, he headed not only the technical but also the scientific rearming of the army. Iakir, one of the most thoughtful and authoritative commanders, also became a member of the RVS USSR.

In the first half of the thirties there developed a very strong leadership group for the military apparat, which was intent on improving the efficiency of the army. The RVS remained the highest organ of the RKKA. Since the time of the revolution it had increasingly become a formality of an office, rubber-stamping the decisions of the top four or five military leaders; however, it existed, and to a certain extent it tied Voroshilov and Stalin's hands. In 1934, under the pretext of improving the military apparat, the RVS

was abolished and the People's Commissariat of Military and Naval Affairs was renamed the People's Commissariat of Defense. The new Commissariat became the sole commanding body of the RKKA and RKKF (Navy). It received the authority to make decisions without discussion, but Voroshilov, well knowing the extent of his incompetence, did not dare to make independent decisions of great importance.

The rearming of the army went ahead full speed and well. Toward the end of the twenties all institutions of higher learning of the technical branches had been foolishly combined into a single Military-Technical Academy. Now out of it were recreated the Military-Engineering, Electrotechnical, Chemical Defense, Mechanization and Motorization, and Aviation Engineering Academies of the RKKA. New Air Force and General Staff Academies also appeared. By the mid-thirties several graduating classes had qualitatively strengthened the army's intelligentsia.

At Tukhachevskii's initiative a new office was established to develop and introduce new military technology. Outstanding engineers, such as L. V. Kurchevskii, V. I. Bekauri, N. E. Langemak, and P. I. Grakhovskii, worked in the Ostekhbiuro, the Special technical bureau.

They were impressively successful at developing new military technology. The creative enthusiasm of the five-year plan was probably more strongly evinced in constructing highly developed armaments than in any other field. Tupolev's planes set several new records that startled the rest of the world - including a flight across the North Pole to the American mainland. Soviet armored vehicle technology, which barely existed in the twenties, progressed very rapidly.<sup>7</sup> The crown of its development was the T-34 tank, which was unrivaled until the end of the second World War. Work in such new fields as radar and jet weaponry also made pioneering achievements. Tukhachevskii,

Alksnis, Khalepskii, and their co-workers were responsible in large part for these achievements. Not only did they value the research of the outstanding engineers, but they succeeded in creating for them favorable working conditions, which was far from an easy thing. The best military engineers of the time worked under their protection: Tupolev, Polikarpov, Il'iushin-in aviation; Degtiarev, Tokarev - in small arms; Kotov - in tank construction; Langemak, Pobedonostsev - in jet-propelled projectiles, the "katiusha" prototypes; Tsander and Korolev - in rockets.

The new technology was quickly put on line. Todorskii remembered that "in 1932 the Kharkov factory completed two tanks with difficulty [that was in a full year], but in 1935 whole companies of the machines rolled off its conveyors daily."<sup>8</sup> It is worth pointing out that the head of the Kharkov Tank Factory was the Ukrainian commander Iakir.

The troops began to assimilate the technical innovations. The Belorussian and especially the Ukrainian Military Districts were used as experimental proving grounds. It was in the Ukraine that the famous maneuvers of 1935-1936 were conducted in the presence of foreign observers. Besides the English, French, and Czechs, there were also Italians present. The maneuvers had a two-fold purpose. First of all, they were an exercise in cooperation of the new tank, aviation, and airborne troops with the infantry. Iakir deserves the credit for coordinating their movements and instructing the units in these new skills. He was an outstanding practitioner of military organization but unfortunately left behind no written works. At this time he worked very closely with Tukhachevskii, the apostle of the mechanized army offensive. Iakir, while he agreed fully about the importance of technology, preferred strategic defense. Besides the line of fortifications in which he was involved, it was due to his efforts that a network of partisan bases was



established in case of enemy occupation. This project died an early death before the start of the world war.

Iakir's defensive sympathies, in this case supported by Tukhachevskii, determined the character of the maneuvers of 1935, which were called "Battle for Kiev". The "red" troops, fully armed with modern technology, skillfully defended the city from an enemy attack. Documentary films of the maneuvers became very popular. The second purpose of the exercises was to demonstrate to the West the might of the RKKA. The foreign observers were startled. The world press buzzed with reports about the strength of the Soviets.

Over the next several years powerful, permanent fortifications were constructed in the Ukrainian and Belorussian military districts. Uborevich and especially Iakir were closely involved with them. One can question the practical value of such fortifications in general, but as an example of the art these were not in any way inferior to the Maginot and Mannerheim lines. Unfortunately they were not tested in war. Stalin in his wisdom thought to disarm them before the war began. . .

Side by side with those changes military theory developed rapidly and fruitfully. The most noticeable results were produced in the fields of tactics and campaign tactics. Here the Soviet school kept pace with all of Europe and in some cases outstripped the Europeans. The theory of "deep operations" crowned the thought of the period. Tukhachevskii, N. N. Movchin, N. E. Varfolomeev, V. K. Triandafillov, and B. K. Kalinovskii (the last two died in 1931 in a plane crash) laid the ground for that work with their ideas of "sequential operations" in the twenties. It was carried further by a group of able and energetic theoreticians led by G. S. Isserson.

Inasmuch as the offensive was considered the basic form of combat activity of the RKKA, the theory began with offensive operations. At this point we

must make a brief digression. Although the forms of conducting war have undergone many radical changes in human history, the logical principles at its foundation were discovered long ago. This is particularly true of tactics, the art of organizing battle, direct armed conflict. Thus in the 4th century B. C. the Theban general Epaminondas applied a concentration of his forces against a vulnerable point in his foe's formation. Two and a half thousand years ago Hannibal faced the formidable Romans at Cannae with, to use its modern name, an operational pocket. Both of these principles remain effective still. When they were working out their theory of deep operations, the Soviet theoreticians made them applicable to modern weaponry.

The enemy's front, even if it is continuous, unavoidably has weak places, usually where the flanks of adjoining units met. This determines the direction of the main strike, where troops must be concentrated to outman the enemy troops and weaponry by three to five times, and must be disposed three or four echelons deep. The breakthrough of the tactical zone of defense begins with a massive artillery bombardment of the sector selected for attack. Then the infantry with its direct support tanks accomplishes the breakthrough and consolidates its hold to allow the second echelon, the sappers, to make the defense zone passable for the mobile units. Then mechanized and cavalry corps, which had not participated in the first wave, are thrown against the enemy's operational deep defenses. There should theoretically be several of these sectors along a front, one for every army or group. The theory postulated that such operational breakthroughs by mobile units, supported by airborne landings, would lead to surrounding and destroying considerable forces of the enemy and finally to seriously weakening his combat potential.

For the time this was an original theory of offense. It was worked out in the maneuvers of the thirties with mechanized corps and large airborne formations, both of which branches of service were first established and tested in the RKKA. The young Soviet theoreticians became pioneers in solving some of the problems of attack in future war. It should be noted, however, that the theory they created was neither complete nor mature.

We give here only a condensed summary of the basic premises of deep operations, which is based on the writing of one of its creators, G. S. Isserson. Other interesting developments of the period, for example the ideas and principles of organizing and employing large units of mechanized forces, has too specialized a character to discuss it here.<sup>9</sup>

Isserson very colorfully described the essence of deep operations:

. . . from an exhausting, crawling, sequential overcoming of resistance by fire bit by bit, stage by stage, we have arrived at the simultaneous containment and suppression of the whole tactical depth of the enemy. With one simultaneous completely overwhelming strike we will break and destroy opposing resistance. This solves the problem of overcoming the fire front in all its depth.<sup>10</sup>

Such a radical approach was a reaction to the excruciating, muddy trench war of 1914-1918, in which the main factors were powerful defense works, the spreading of the front to natural limits, and the insufficient striking power of attackers. It was thought that fronts would be as continuous in the next war and more deeply echeloned. To effectively use the increased strength - striking and mechanized - of the offensive, it was decided to resort to deeply echeloned offensive formations:

Modern operations are operations in depth. They must be planned in their whole depth and prepared to overcome the whole depth [of the enemy] . . . a linear strategy of one wave of operational efforts can not solve the problem of offense.<sup>11</sup>

The goal can no longer be reached by a single strike or battle. Operations will be complex. They will become a planned sequence of deep strikes. Extensive planning will precede every operation. That stage will be fully controlled; it is almost entirely in the hands of the commander. "The greatest pressure and crisis can be expected at the end." The character of battle: "It will be a solid sea of fire and battle, which spread widely across the front in the [first] world war, and which will spread through the whole depth in future war." He who at the moment of crisis in the slaughter proves stronger and better organized will win:

. . . an offensive must become like a whole series of waves, which with increasing force beat against the shore, to wipe it away, to destroy it with ceaseless blows from the depths. A modern complex deep operation is not decided by one simultaneous blow of coinciding efforts. It requires the deep, operational layering of these efforts, which must become stronger as the moment of victory comes nearer.<sup>12</sup>

It is easy to see that this conception leaves no room for art, skill, efforts to outfox the enemy, to catch him off guard. "Reason lies at the foundation of military operations," Clausewitz once said. Here power, will, organization, and purposefulness are all. The goal is the physical suppression and literal destruction of the enemy. The method - a programmed

series of crushing frontal attacks. In this "sea of battle" the victor is he who possesses the stronger forehead and fist.

It would be a mistake, however, to see the theory of deep operations as simply mechanized violence. It truly expressed in a concentrated form the tendency of military thought of the 1930s. The Germans employed it with great success in Poland and France. In 1943-45 Soviet troops frequently inflicted deeply echeloned strikes.

The problem was that method of conducting combat operations was promoted as universal, as the only possible. Moreover, it contained flaws, which its proponents tried not to see. In the absence of decisive superiority over the enemy, in the face of the skill and mobility of his defense over a large strategic area, the attacker will not only not achieve victory, but will make himself extremely vulnerable. Every boxer knows that it is when he tries to deliver the knockout punch that he is himself most open. If the punch does not land, the opponent can move in easily with counter punches. Svechin had already applied that analogy to strategy in the twenties, but no one cared to listen to him. The creators of the deep operation only rarely, reluctantly, and in passing mentioned defense. And in those instances their colorful, energetic language suddenly becomes dull and lifeless. They are utterly silent about the cost of any offensive. We, however, will have to touch upon those dull subjects.

Even a fleeting acquaintance with the theory of deep operations suffices to isolate its principle traits. It is extremely aggressive and exclusively straightforward. It starts with an assumption of overwhelming superiority for the attacker and does not take account of losses. The reasons, of course, are not to be found in the bloodthirstiness of the theoreticians, but in their professed strategic ideology. He who believes in the strategy of destruction

(blitzkrieg in German), can not come to other conclusions about operations and tactics. To grind the enemy's defense to powder, and the enemy too - that was all there was to it. What this frontal approach might cost in modern warfare did not interest the doctrine's creators. They had already proclaimed that flanking attacks would be rare, and frontal attacks the rule. There was nothing left but to beat one's head against the nearest defensive wall.

The Germans thought in the same way. Looking back over three decades, Isserson noted that Guderian had preached the same methods of breaking through prepared defenses with tanks in 1937 that Soviet theoreticians had introduced in 1932-1933. That is close to the truth, but what is more important than the priority of authorship is that the methods of deep operations were extensively applied in the Second World War. They yielded individual operational fruits, but their cost, as a rule, was extremely high. They were paid for by strategic exhaustion.

Tukhachevskii, Triandafillov, and Isserson heatedly refuted Svechin's conclusions about the advantages of mobile, strategic defense in a large war. Svechin was liquidated in 1938, but his conclusions were confirmed. Hitler and the Japanese did fine while they were fighting weak or unprepared countries. But then in total war assaults in the blitzkrieg style failed, despite their stunning successes at the outset. German troops mastered Western Europe, invaded Africa, occupied the Balkans and Scandinavia, seized Poland, the Ukraine, Belorussia, the Baltic countries, and almost half of European Russia. They pushed almost to Moscow and Leningrad, broke through to the Volga, threatened Transcaucasia - and ended in unconditional surrender. The same fate awaited Japan, which at one time controlled enormous territory in east and southeast Asia and almost all of the Pacific Ocean basin.

Even more strongly than these generally known facts another circumstance supports Svechin's concept. Superaggressive Germany, which was forced in 1943 to go over to strategic defense, held out for two years, fighting alone against the whole world. B. Liddell Hart, the most prominent military theoretician in the West, came to this conclusion at the end of the Second World War:

When account is taken of the shrinkage of the German forces, and of their material resources, it appears almost a miracle that their resistance lasted as long as it did, when stretched over so wide a circumference... it was, above all, proof of the immense inherent strength of modern defence. On any orthodox military calculation the German forces were inadequate to resist for even a week the weight of attacking power which they withstood for many months. When they could hold frontages of reasonable proportion to their strength, they frequently beat off attacks delivered with a superiority of a force of over six to one, and sometimes over twelve to one...

If Germany's opponents had recognized that condition in advance, and had themselves prepared to meet aggression in a way suited to make the most of the defensive advantage, the world would have been saved immense trouble and tragedy. Long ago, that famous pugilist, Jem Mace, summed up all his experience of the ring in the maxim: 'Let 'em come to ye, and they'll beat themselves.'

The truth of Jem Mace's maxim became the outstanding tactical lesson of the battlefields in Africa, Russia, and

Western Europe. With growing experience all skillful commanders sought to profit by the power of the defensive, even when on the offensive.<sup>13</sup>

We might be criticized in that it is easy to find fault in hindsight. But here Isserson can help us out. This important military writer, who miraculously survived Stalin's purges, in the mid-sixties published a retrospective survey, which includes many bitter admissions.<sup>14</sup>

Most importantly he asserts that the theory of "deep operations" developed independently of strategy:

The theory of deep operations reached the level of development it did in 1936, when it was no longer possible to exclude the strategic sphere of its application, and when only strategic scale and circumstances in the whole theater of military operations might give it intelligent meaning, purposeful and justified by conditions of the time. . . . In other words, to turn the scheme of deep operations into a real phenomenon, it was necessary to put it against a strategic background and breathe strategic content into it.

It should be said that the strategy of destruction, the spirit of which fills the theory of deep operations, was not worked out in the same sense as Svechin's doctrine but was merely proclaimed. We might object to Isserson, that it would be more fruitful to first formulate and interpret strategic principles and then be guided by them in developing campaign tactics. That would be superfluous, however, as neither was done at the time.

In 1936 the operations department of the Frunze Academy was made into the Academy of the General Staff. But "this changed nothing in the system of our higher military education in relation to strategy." Why? Surely the Academy



had been formed to prepare higher, that is strategic, cadre. Listen how that was done:

. . . the slightest hint that it was necessary in one form or another to introduce into the academy a course on strategy as the basis of campaign tactics ran into objections from on high. When this question was raised at a meeting before the Academy was opened, the Chief of the General Staff, Marshall Egorov, directly questioned representatives of the academy in an exasperated voice: "And what sort of strategy will you study? The plan of war? Strategic deployment? The conduct of war? No one is going to let you do that, because that is the business of the General Staff:"

When he put it that way, of course, no one was going to protest. . .

If strategy in this manner was to be the personal property of Stalin, Voroshilov, and Egorov, then the blindness of campaign tactics was inevitable. Stalin and his stooges thought of war only as "a little blood on foreign territory" and did not care to hear about defense in any form. The higher commanders, carefully trained in their stupidity, relied exclusively on the deep destructive strike and ignored a multiplicity of aspects of combat conditions. This was true also of their beloved offensive:

It was assumed that the initial strategic deployment would form a solid front, which would have to be broken through and necessarily by a frontal assault. From the point of view of the calculation of forces and the capacity of the theater that was generally true. But that did not taken

into consideration the new potentialities of motorized-mechanized forces to broach the front before it has time to be organized and established.

Without a doubt this refers to the German success of 1941. Questions of strategic deployment in the earlier phases of war and the action of invasion groups Egorov interpreted in the old way, in the spirit of the first world war. Tukhachevskii protested energetically, but unsuccessfully, against this approach. Observing rapidly arming Germany, which revealed itself in 1935, he began to understand that blitzkrieg alone would not be enough. They would have to concern themselves as quickly as possible with preparing strategic defense.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile things were not going well with the methods of defense either at the strategic or on the operational levels.

Throughout the history of the Frunze Military Academy and the Academy of the General Staff the topic "The Army and Defense" was never thoroughly investigated. Our tactical defense was well worked out and occupied the place it should in all our field manuals. But it seemed almost to contradict our offensive doctrine and was considered somehow indecent to discuss defense of the army over a significant sector of a theater of military operations.

Only after most of the commanders had been liquidated was a timid attempt made to do something about it. The Academy published The Foundation of Defensive Operations in 1938.<sup>16</sup> No one dared go farther, however. The work did not receive official approval and went for nought. No one so much as mentioned strategic defense.

The war came even closer, and the stagnation of military thought went on:

Our campaign tactics were shut up in their own framework to a certain extent, and the strategic aspects of war remained, unfortunately, uninvestigated in our military theory.

Needed interest in the early phases of war was not stimulated, and the necessary theoretical conclusions applicable to our western theater of military operations were not made. This was certainly a gap in our military theory, and, of course, it showed at the beginning of the war in 1941.

And that was not all. There was even an attempt to retreat from the positions we had gained. In the period of the purges Voroshilov, bathed in the sweat of fear, called the theory of "deep operations" the "theory of treason". For several years it was under a ban. That was understandable. Practically all of the authors of original works and texts had been repressed, and their books were withdrawn from circulation. The fists of the deep operation, the mechanized corps, were disbanded after the Polish campaign and the failure in Spain. At the same time the development of bombardment aviation was curtailed. Mechanized corps were reestablished in December 1940.

Uncertainty and fear for one's life became part of the army environment. Nonetheless, the enemy was still scorned:

Even the events in Poland in 1939 and in France in 1940 did not change the dominant official views, did not shake them. However, in the recesses of their minds the higher-ranking officers of the General Staff understood that the circumstances of the early period of a war might turn out completely differently. In several circles of the General

Staff and the AGSh men spoke rather concretely with the relevant calculations in hand. However, these conversations were conducted behind closed doors only and did not go beyond their offices.

It was with this theoretical baggage and in this temper that the Red Army went to war. If we are to be precise, this was no longer the Red Army but its successor as yet not renamed. The RKKA ceased to exist in 1938 when its higher command staff was almost entirely wiped out along with more than half of its mid-level commanders.

Let us go back a few years. Say what you might, despite all the obstacles and difficulties, both real and invented by the Stalinist leadership, the RKKA of the mid-thirties was a magnificent, first-class army. The best in the history of the country. It was the best army in Europe at the time, certainly the most intelligent. It was rich in talented people, having searched out and absorbed what was best among the people.

It was an army created by the revolution. The politicians used the army frequently, but still the RKKA more than any other state institution embodied the revolutionary spirit: liberation from the fetters of centuries of slavery, the shackles of backwardness and ignorance; striving to limitless improvement; irrepressible optimism. As Liddell Hart said about the army of the French revolution, this spirit "made pedantic regimentation impossible, and gave scope to the development of the talents and initiative of individuals."<sup>17</sup>

A new generation of military intellectuals grew up in the army. They took on extremely difficult tasks and accomplished many of them brilliantly. From top to bottom it was an army willing to learn. Commanders of a new sort educated a new type of soldier, unknown to the imperial army. They succeeded

extraordinarily. They taught barely literate country boys not only the wisdom of cannon fodder but the skills of culture. They prepared them for life. It is unlikely that there was anywhere else an atmosphere more full of the reforms and hopes aroused by the revolution.

The simple soldiery and gentlemen officers of the tsarist army were gone. In their place were comrades-in-arms - red army men and commanders. Regimentation was replaced by study, brass polishing by combat training. The lower ranks did not stand to attention for the higher. There were no ranks until 1935, only responsibilities. Regular forms of address entailed only respect for human dignity. Acknowledgement of an order was a simple "yes". Having shot the RKKA, they instituted the servile forms "I obey", "just exactly", and "in no way, no". They were ashamed to return to such barracks gems as "glad to try" and "extremely grateful", but the effect was the same.

Even the external appearance of the men of all ranks in the RKKA had something noble and severely romantic about it. The uniform was simple and exactly the same for everyone. To eradicate this hated spirit the old uniform was done away with and the field uniform of the tsarist army was reintroduced. The epaulets alone provoked complex memories and emotions. At the same time the militia were decked out like tsarist policemen. What Stalin was thinking at the time is hard to say. Maybe he hoped that men dressed in great coats like that would feel less of a desire to think. Maybe he wanted to wipe out even the external reminders of the revolution, an epoch which in his opinion had passed. It cannot be excluded that he wished to attract the sympathy of that part of the population who would prefer a simply Russian army to a revolutionary army.

God knows what it was, but a goal was reached. The figure of the warrior - the soldier in his khakis and the officer in better cloth - drooped and

paled. The senior officers and generals got the old-regime look they wanted. The former soldier's tunic did not suit most of them. The baggy jackets still hid the belly a little, that important organ which protruded a bit on most of the Soviet leadership of the time. Little operetta details, stripes and red linings for the generals, fur caps for the colonels, and other tinsel, could not make it right.

The best of times for the Red Army were hateful to Stalin. He was not an enemy of the army in general. To the contrary. From the time of the civil war he always dressed in a uniform of sorts with boots. In 1929 he appointed himself the great leader of the revolution. No, Stalin, who probably could not field strip a 7.62, loved to direct operations and command all the armed forces.

But the failed seminarist, having become the leading light of all other affairs, still could not impress the RKKA, where the revolutionary spirit that had already died in the party and other bureaucracies was still strong. (The manual of garrison duty still read that all orders, except clearly counter-revolutionary orders, must be obeyed.) He especially disliked the higher command - mostly young, intelligent men with independent ideas, which he simply could not understand. It was not entirely without purpose that he killed them all, even those who danced to his tune.

After 1938 it was easier. Stalin appointed tamer men, without particular ideas and, most important, mute. But still for a long time they pursued and repressed everything that might remind them of the past. It did not end with changing uniforms. In 1941-1942 many large units were written off the books as if they had perished in battle, or they were disbanded. In 1942 along with the reintroduction of shoulder straps, the idea of an officer corps was revived, and officers were sharply separated from the soldiers. At the same

time the institution of commissars was abolished. It had happened several times before, but this was the last. In 1944 they renamed the whole army.

Along with the cadre they destroyed what was best in the Red Army - the spirit, traditions, military culture. In the young, powerful organism of the RKKA even many of the shortcomings were continuations of strengths. With maturity these phenomena would have had to fade away - the dogmatism of conclusions and the excessively offensive temper. This was an army strong enough to face any enemy. It is impossible to imagine that the RKKA would have surrendered half the country to Hitler.





## Chapter 16

### The 17th Congress: The Victors Dig Their Own Grave

. . . piously sure of the truth of  
classes and not knowing other truths,  
they themselves gave meat to smell to  
the beasts that later ripped them.

Korzhavin

When the Congress convened on January 26, 1934, the country was experiencing famine, but the bureaucrats' morale was high. Stalin showered the delegates with data, mostly expressed in percentages, which were meant to prove the unprovable - that everything was all right.

The word famine was, of course, unsuitable and was not used. Instead, difficulties that had been successfully overcome were mentioned. Grain supplies, for example, were sufficient. These are the figures presented by the general secretary on the gross yield of grain in millions of metric centners (100 kg)<sup>1</sup>:

1913	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933
735	725	725 <sup>2</sup>	717	835	695	699	898

According to Stalin's figures, there was a small decrease in the gross yield in the years of most active collectivization, 1931 and 1932. If we compare it with the figure for 1929, we find a decrease of three to four percent. The delegates must have scratched their heads. The loss was insignificant, but the famine was terrible. Even by the most conservative estimates five to six million peasants died of malnutrition in those years.

Where can we find a solution to this paradox? It might be suggested that certain officials improved the statistics for the report just a trifle. We are not able to test such an assertion, but we can run a different sort of check on the basis of official statistics.

Proclaiming collectivization, Stalin complained about the low marketability of individual peasant farms. The 1926 harvest almost equaled the last pre-war harvest (95%), but marketable grain (in circulation outside the villages, that is, in fact, given to the state) was only half the 1913 level. In 1927 and 1928 marketable grain reached only 37% of the 1913 level. Because of the Draconian measures employed in collecting grain in 1929, this figure jumped to 58%, and at the height of collectivization in 1930 to 73%. Stalin was modestly silent about subsequent years, but it is not hard to guess that marketable grain did not decrease because it was easier to collect grain from state farms than it was from individual peasants.

Turning to natural indices we can see how much grain was collected by the state and how much remained in the villages. For reference, marketable grain in 1913 amounted to 208 million centners.

Collected by the state (millions of centners)					
1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932
77	77	119	152	183 <sup>3</sup>	205-210 <sup>3</sup>
Remaining in the villages					
1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932
658	648	598	683	512	494
% 100	98.5	91	108	77.5 <sup>4</sup>	75 <sup>4</sup>

We see that the decrease was not so modest after all. It turns out that in the years of artificial harvest shortfalls there was 25% less grain in the

villages. One might think that this shortfall is not so terrible, but we have not finished our calculations.

We must not forget that in the early thirties two-thirds of the peasants became collective farmers (kolkhozniki).<sup>5</sup> The first commandment in the kolkhoz was well known: GIVE GRAIN TO THE STATE! And they gave - no less than 30%.<sup>6</sup> As recently as 1927 that had been only 9.5%. They poured another 20% at least into the state seed-fund<sup>7</sup>, 15-20% was taken for the kolkhoz seed-fund and for feed for the kolkhoz's cattle; at least another 10% was lost in harvesting, threshing, and storing - which the backward yeoman farmer would understandably not have permitted. Taken all together, it appears that the peasant had left for himself only one-half or one-third of the grain that he had had in 1927-1928.<sup>8</sup>

A half or two-thirds less bread might not be so hard on us, just a little belt-tightening. But bread was the staple of the Russian peasants' diet, and that meant famine. He had never had enough meat for most of a year, only in the fall after the annual butchering. Now there was no meat or milk to speak of. The peasants had butchered as much of their livestock as they were able on the way to the kolkhoz, and the kolkhoz's animals were not for him. In 1933 there remained as a percentage of the levels of 1929: cattle - 56.6%, sheep and goats - 34.5%, pigs - 58.1%, horses - 48.7%.

And how was it for the inhabitants of the non-black soil regions, where even in good years there was not enough grain to last from one harvest to the next? Now, after collectivization, they could not buy supplementary grain on the free market, because there wasn't any. The peasants, like the workers and office workers, were not given rationing cards. They died of starvation, whole villages and volosts.<sup>9</sup> But the same horrors occurred in the fertile Ukraine.

The state received three times more grain for its own uses, so collectivization seemed successful from its point of view. What did the state do with all that grain if the urban population was doled out only limited amounts by ration cards? Surely Stalin and his courageous comrades-in-arms could not devour millions of centners of bread, and meat, and butter? They did not starve, that goes without saying, but most of the grain was exported - to pay the huge expenses of industrialization.<sup>10</sup>

Stalin did not think of anything new. He followed Trotskyist recipes. One of their authors, Preobrazhenskii, devised the theory of "primitive socialist accumulation". According to the theory, the building of socialism in its first stage should be accomplished mainly by the maximum appropriation by the state of the surplus product produced in the "un-socialist sphere" - by peasants, handicraftsmen, NEPmen. It sounded excessively candid, and the theory was criticized as destructive of the alliance with the peasantry. That did not stop Stalin from carrying it out with a zeal found in neither Preobrazhenskii or Trotskii.

Molotov announced at the congress that during the five-year plan 1.5 billion rubles gold were spent abroad to purchase industrial equipment. A huge figure. It is enough to look at a list of the largest projects. They were all equipped with foreign machinery, built according to plans made by foreign firms and in consultation with foreign specialists. Only the slave labor was native and cheap: prisoners, kulaks, and starving peasants from all over Russia who were willing to work for food alone.<sup>11</sup> In the five years of the plan the following enterprises were put into operation: in ferrous metals industries - Magnitka, Kuznetsk, Zaporozhstal', the first part of Nizhnyi Tagil; several plants were also reconstructed; tractor factories in Kharkov, Stalingrad, and Cheliabinsk; automobile plants in Moscow and Nizhnii Novgorod;

Dneproges and Bereznikov chemical combinat. Besides that several enterprises in other fields were reconstructed, again using imported machine tools and machines.

Thus, much of the foundation for heavy industrialization was laid in the first five-year plan. The people ought to have been told, however, at what cost this was achieved. It was not only the price of labor and sweat. The industrial cathedrals cost the lives of millions of Russians. To the five million who died of famine must be added another ten million liquidated as a class.

The capital accumulated at the cost of human lives sank into the bottomless maw of the five-year plan. A lot simply evaporated into thin air. There were many reasons: the unrestrained, grandiose fantasies of Kuibyshev, who crushed VSNKh and Gosplan, removing every specialist who might know a little something so he could insert ridiculous figures into the plan; the absence of qualified workers because the old engineers were purged on the eve of reconstruction in 1928-1930; theft and slovenliness; the pomposity of the political overseers.

The first five-year plan was catastrophically unfulfilled in metals production and coal mining. The story of the ferrous metals industry is especially instructive. In 1928 Kuibyshev's VSNKh submitted its own version of the five-year plan - the so-called optimal or maximal plan - which exceeded Gosplan's goals by 150-200%. The Gosplan experts laughed at it and tried to explain that the tempo could not be sustained, that the figures were unrealistic: "The VSNKh's figures are beyond the bounds of the possible in this five-year plan" (Profesor Bogolepov). "I expect that Gosplan would evaluate the VSNKh five-year plan as possible in eight, if not ten, years" (Prof. Kalinnikov).<sup>12</sup>

Not likely! Comrade Kuibyshev did not graduate from universities; he had dropped out of high school; in everything he was guided by class consciousness. The muddle-headed wrecker-professors were cleared out - imprisoned or exiled.<sup>13</sup> Kuibyshev exulted. At the 16th Congress, just warming to the battle, he said:

. . . do you remember when VSNKh proposed a figure of ten million tons of cast iron, when the alternatives were six, then seven, then eight million tons in Gosplan's original plan. At that time the smelting of ten million tons of iron seemed impossible . . . Bourgeois economists who scoffed at us and called our plans fantasies had in mind first of all that figure - ten million tons of iron. Now that "fantasy" has been increased by seven million tons, and the increased plan of seventeen million tons will provoke even greater fury in the capitalistic world. When we fulfill that program, comrades, we will become the leading producer of iron in Europe. (applause).<sup>14</sup>

It did not do Kuibyshev any good to fill everyone's ears with tales of 10 to 17 million tons. The bourgeoisie economists had a right to laugh. The "fury of the capitalist world" was a figment; so was the metal . . .

1934 rolled around. A new Congress met. For some reason no one gave a specific report on the results of the first five-year plan outlining how much of anything was projected and how much achieved. Stalin and all the others used only excerpted facts, only the most positive, and never side by side with the plan's targets. Instead there were two reports on the second five-year plan by Molotov and Kuibyshev. At that time the chairman of the Council of People's Commissars noted that in 1932 there were produced . . . 6.2 million

tons of iron. The favorite device of percentage gains was missing. But it is not hard to figure. If we take the minimal estimate of 10 million tons, the plan was 62% fulfilled. Recall that the experts had suggested 6, 7, then 8 million tons. In that case the percent would have been lovely. But if we take Kuibyshev's last, triumphal cry, then the results are sad indeed - only 36.5%.

Ordzhonikidze let slip in a swaggering sort of speech how some of the newest, largest plants of the time managed to produce so little metal:

. . . I remember that an engineer of the MacKee firm implored me not to put the blast furnace into operation that winter: "If there are no political considerations, please do not use it," said engineer Haven in 1931, "because it will collapse." He proved to be a prophet as far as the first blast furnace was concerned. We killed it. But we destroyed it because we mishandled it, while our young engineers operated the fourth blast furnace when it was 35 below, and it works fine."<sup>15</sup>

They destroyed one, and the other worked fine . . . So said the director of all heavy industry. That is 50%.

Ordzhonikidze forgot to say that the foolish destruction of equipment was not the only problem. The Chairman of the TsKK added a little something. On July 1, 1933, said Rudzutak, almost 220,000,000 rubles worth of equipment, almost entirely foreign, was found idle in metallurgical plants.<sup>16</sup> To evaluate just how large a loss this was, we have to know that in the previous three and a half years one billion rubles worth of machines were imported for all heavy industry.

So what did Kuibyshev do? Was he embarrassed, did he acknowledge his error, set the professors free with an apology? Nothing of the sort. Without

saying a word about his monstrous error, he projected a goal of 18 million tons of iron for the end of the second five-year plan in 1937.

Apparently there were serious disagreements in compiling the plan. Ordzhonikidze opened: the tempo is just right, Leninist, Stalinist; let's not overdo it. He recommended decreasing the plan's goals by 10% for the whole economy and by 6% in heavy industry. He did not forget iron: why say 18 million, he asked, 16 million would be fine. At this point Voroshilov, Vareikis, and Kirov shouted, "Right!", and Molotov expressed agreement. They did not want to have to cope with Kuibyshev's fantasy for another five years.

Things were bad with coal also. At first a goal of 75 million tons was set, but then in connection with the change of plans in metals that figure was raised to 125 million. Already in 1930 people in the know were warning the coal was being taken at an accelerated pace only from existing mines. No new mines were being opening up, and the apparent rise in production could not be maintained. In the last year of the five-year plan 64.2 million tons was mined, that is 85.6% and 51.5% of the original and final goals respectively.

Failures in the metallurgical and mining industries were not exceptions. They stand out clearly because in these industries the production of all enterprises is the same - iron, steel, rolled metals, coal - because it is all measured in tons. It is hard to play with the figures.

Machine-building is a more fruitful field for paper successes: the results of production are displayed in rubles. Thanks to that everything came out the way Stalin and Kuibyshev wanted. In his unfortunate speech at the previous congress Kuibyshev said that 17 million tons of iron would determine everything else, especially machine-building. But marvelous are Your works, Lord! You did not give Kuibyshev all the metal he asked for, only one-third of it, and still the growth in machine-building was as expected - to the



furious envy of the capitalist world. Production of ferrous metals doubled but of machines increased 13 times! In 1928 703 million rubles-worth was produced;<sup>17</sup> in 1932 - 9300 million rubles-worth.<sup>18</sup> It was a miracle wrought by a Bolshevik. One might also think that there had been huge metal reserves hidden away somewhere. But that was not the case. Before the five-year plan the country had experienced a severe metals shortage.

The explanation is simple. Industrialization was accompanied by increasing specialization of separate factories and this led to an increase of double counting. Prices on metals and machines increased extraordinarily (which Voroshilov vaguely referred to), and of course figures were also exaggerated. All of this produced extra machines of ink and paper, for there was not the steel and iron for them.

Not everything was quite so sad. There was one aspect of the five-year plan for which the figures were wholly accurate - capital investment. When it came to wasting the people's money, everyone strove to do it more and faster, little caring for its utility. Investments for the whole five-year plan were said to be 13 billion rubles, but already in the first three years they had managed to spend 11 billion, instead of the planned 6.86. Where the rest came from it is better not to ask.<sup>19</sup>

The reader must not think that the whole plan was a sham. A number of huge factories were actually put into operation. We have named most of them. The Soviet Union began to produce some of its own machines: tractors, combines, trucks, tanks, planes. It is impossible to dispute the vital necessity to industrialize. But we must question the need for such an hysterical race, when elementary technical and economic rules were consciously violated and it led, naturally, to huge losses. Why were things not run by the specialists instead of the untrained politicians? Why was it so unplanned

(Kyuibyshev's fantasies can not be considered planning)? Why, finally, did we have to pay such an inhuman price, dooming millions of people to death or suffering?

All the fuss about tempos could only fool fools. Low starting points easily produce high percentage growth figures. If you add one new factory to the only other one in operation, you get growth of 100%. But still it is only one factory in a huge country. Even Stalin understood that.

The Bolsheviks preferred to forget that Russia was undergoing very rapid economic growth in the 1890s, which continued into the First World War. Economic dislocation increased rapidly in 1918. The major cause was not the civil war, as is commonly thought. Neither the Reds nor the Whites bombed industrial enterprises in that war. The destruction was caused by the nationalization of industry, which had been recklessly carried out by the Bolsheviks. Almost immediately the new masters were incapable of running the economy. There followed a decade of stagnation and regression, hypocritically called a period of reconstruction. Except for nationalization and other wonders, the plants and factories, as everywhere else in the world, would have gone on making a profit and accumulating capital. It would not have been necessary to rob and destroy the peasantry. Great leaps would not have been needed. To put it mildly, we stood around for ten years and then hurried to make up for it in just five years, which urgently became four years. If we compare the real tempos of the five-year plan to the whole period 1921-1932, it immediately becomes clear: Russia would probably have industrialized faster in normal economic conditions. Everything was done, however, to make conditions as abnormal as possible. And in the end there was not much to brag about. The Bolsheviks only partially filled the vacuum they had created.

We have bored the reader with statistics (and grown weary of them ourselves), but an economic picture drawn only with words looks pale and incomplete. Probably many of the participants at the congress saw through the statistical lies of Stalin and Kuibyshev, maybe they felt an icy draft from the millions of graves, maybe they seethed with anger and indignation. Stalin, the instigator, organizer, and inspirer of the whole bloody deception understood best of all the critical nature of his position. But just let them try to get to the bottom of it - there would be less than the proverbial damp spot left, not an inkspot. Everything hinged on the long-suffering of the people. Also on the ignorance, disorganization, sluggishness, indecisiveness, and cowardice of the Party masses. And of course on personal dexterity, purposefulness, and unscrupulousness.

As we see it, Stalin's plan was to avoid discussion of recent events at the Congress and to use the forum to deafen the delegates and their constituents with false propaganda, the noise of self-glorification, and theatrical effects. Later he would get around to breaking heads, which was more practical than trying to shut mouths or tie hands. The signal to begin mass terror within the party - the murder of Kirov - was given the year of the Congress.

It is said, and it can be believed, although not with much certainty, that many delegates were considering trying to remove Stalin from his post as leader of the Party. This is the tactic they adopted for the purpose. They would not criticize Stalin or, God forbid, expose him in speeches at the Congress so that the Party might still appear monolithic abroad and at home, but in elections to the TsK they would cast more votes against the great leader. Although Stalin would be re-elected (they did not expect to be able to exclude him), it would be awkward for him to remain General Secretary. Kirov would take that position.

Nothing come of it. Stalin kept his wits about him, had the protocols of the balloting commission (chairman V. P. Zatonskii) changed, and later cruelly avenged himself on the delegates to the Congress. Almost 80% of them perished in the purges.

If these rumors are true, the conspirators fell to their own cowardly and fallacious tactic. It was much easier for Stalin to falsify the balloting because during the 26 meetings of the Congress not one critical comment, not a hint of one, was directed at him. In those circumstances even a single vote against his election to the TsK would have seemed out of place. Instead there was inordinate praise in every speech and enthusiastic applause through the entire hall.

The tactic of silence was the greatest hypocrisy. It was treason. The people were tormented, starving, crushed. They craved a champion to speak aloud of their suffering, words of comfort and hope; but they did not get them.

Stalin, on the other hand, was already looking far ahead. He succeeded in presenting the main figures of the coming repression in a properly unfavorable light at the Congress. By various machinations he managed to get his erst-while critics and rivals to praise him from the rostrum, to breathlessly glorify Stalinist deeds and himself as the "fieldmarshal of proletarian forces" (Bukharin's phrase). At the same time they made a show of their own mistakes, blindness, stupidity, and insincerity. Their admission sounded much more convincing than the sycophantic speeches of Stalin's accomplices.

Having played their appointed roles, the former oppositionists immediately became the first objects of the terror. They truly brought it on themselves. In 1934 they still wrote their own speeches without the assistance of the NKVD, and they confessed to everything - they recognized the historical righteousness and wisdom of comrade Stalin; they confessed the viciousness of

their own policies, which would lead to the restoration of capitalism and to strengthening the kulak (Bukharin); they confessed to a passive link with determined counter-revolutionaries (Kamenev, Zinov'ev, Tomskii). How can we be surprised that they would move on from such nasty things to open conflict with proletarian authority, to planning the murders of Party leaders, to communicating with fascist intelligence. "A monstrous, but natural development," wrote one publicist. "Only the grave cures hunchbacks. An argument like that was sufficiently convincing for the average man, Party member or not. It did not pretend to be more. Neither did Stalin.

These public confessions destroyed the victims', shall we say, moral right to oppose their accusers to the end. Many of them were dragged out in public trials. It is interesting that the other victims, who had not been previously put through the public penitence, were harder to break. They were usually killed secretly.

Seven members of former oppositions repudiated their past from the rostrum at the Congress: Bukharin, Zinov'ev, Kamenev, Lominadze, Preobrazhenskii, Rykov, and Tomskii.<sup>20</sup> The positions of these reformed heretics were various. The three from the right opposition remained in the TsK and held more or less responsible posts: Bukharin was editor of Izvestiia; Rykov, Peoples' Commissar of Communications; Tomskii, a member of the VSNKh Presidium. Lomindaze had been ejected from the TsK in 1930 and sent to atone for his sins in Magnitogorsk.

Zinov'ev and Kamenev had been expelled from the Party in 1927, but they were soon restored and given work. Kamenev was made head of the Scientific - Technical Department in VSNKh, and in 1929 chairman of the Main Concessions Committee. Zinov'ev, a member of the Presidium of Tsentrosoiuz.<sup>21</sup> In 1932 they were expelled again and sent to Siberia - because when they had become

acquainted with Riutin's platform through Sten, they had not informed the TsK. In 1933 they suddenly showed up in Moscow and after talks with Stalin and Kaganovich were reinstated in the Party. The main condition was their confession at the Congress. Preobrazhenskii's situation was similar. He had been expelled in 1927, admitted to his error in 1929, expelled two years later, and readmitted in 1933.

The oppositionists' speeches were chock-full of hypocrisy and self-abasement. They all immoderately exalted Stalin. Bukharin, Zinov'ev, and Kamenev were at their most repulsive.

Bukharin led the procession of penitents. He began by describing his complete political bankruptcy:

. . . the rights, to whom I belonged, had a different political line, a line against full-time socialist offensive, against a new attack on capitalist elements . . . it was in fact against the forced development of industrialization . . . against the extraordinary and bitter struggle with the kulaks, a struggle which was later exemplified by the slogan, "liquidation of the kulaks as a class" . . .

It is clear that precisely because of this, that group inevitably became the center of gravity for all forces which fought against the socialist offensive. . .<sup>22</sup>

We, Bukharin said, fought with the Party regime, with

. . . comrade Stalin as the supreme spokesman and inspirer of the Party line, Stalin who won the inner-Party struggle on the profoundly principled basis of Leninist policy, and

specifically on that basis received the warm support of the overwhelming, the utterly overwhelming mass of the Party and the working class.

. . . the decisive destruction of that (Bukharinist, rightist - authors) opposition, just like the destruction of the Trotskyist and so-called Leningrad opposition, was a necessary precondition to the successful and victorious development of the socialist offensive.

Therefore

. . . the duty of every member of the Party is struggle with all anti-Party groups, actively and mercilessly struggle, regardless of whatever personal ties and relations there may be, to rally around the TsK, to rally around comrade Stalin as the personal embodiment of the mind and will of the Party, its leader, its theoretical and practical great leader.

Along the way Bukharin lashed out at all of the most recent groups "which ever faster and more consistently have slipped into counter-revolution," and disowned "my former pupils, who have received their just punishment". He had in mind first of all Slepkov, who was imprisoned with Riutin.

Having finished with his errors, self-flagellation, and treachery, Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin reminded his listeners that he was considered a prominent theoretician and was still an active member of the Academy of Sciences. With figures and citations in hand he spoke of the remarkable successes of the Soviet economy, especially of agriculture.

In the recent past Bukharin had also been an international figure - as leader of the Comintern. This had brought him into contact with the foreign

policy of Stalin's government, which he owned to be magnificent. There followed a long denunciation with extensive excerpts from foreign sources of Hitler, of Spengler, the ideologue of fascism, of its poet Yost, and also of the Japanese militarists. Bukharin concluded:

We are the only country which embodies the progressive forces of history. Our Party and comrade Stalin personally are powerful heralds not only of economic, but also of technical and scientific progress on our planet. We are going to battle for the fate of mankind. For that we need unity, unity, and more unity.

Down with all disorganizers.

Long live our Party, that great fighting fraternity, a fraternity of tempered warriors as hard as steel, of brave revolutionaries, who will win all victories under the leadership of the glorious fieldmarshal of the proletarian forces, the best of the best - comrade Stalin. (Applause).

Zinov'ev and Kamenev, the Dobchinskii and Bobchinskii<sup>23</sup> of the Bolshevik revolution, were for some reason let loose during the discussion of the reports on the five-year plan, although they did not mention that topic at all.

Zinov'ev did not follow Bukharin's example. He did not even bother to pretend to make a report, but spoke only of his errors:

I must, it would seem, and its my own fault, entirely my fault, speak only of errors and illustrate them by my own example, to present myself as living illustration of those deviations, those infidelities, those errors and scandalous diversions from Leninism, in battle with which the Party



has achieved those successes to which the whole world attentively turns a watchful eye.

No one can say that I committed any one specific political error. That is half the trouble. I committed a chain of errors, a chain in which one link was unavoidably attached to another. I had the temerity to impose on the Party my own personal understanding of Leninism, my own particular understanding of "the philosophy of an epoch".<sup>24</sup>

He went on in the same vein, in the same long phrases, just as if he were translating from bad German.

Appropriately and inappropriately Zinov'ev fervently and repeatedly bowed deeply to Stalin:

Vladimir Il'ich said of Engels that he belonged to the number of rare, extremely rare writers and thinkers, whose works you can reread many times, everytime finding some new wealth of content. Comrade Stalin's work undoubtedly belongs to this class of works. All of you have done this long ago, done what I have only recently come to. I read and reread his fundamental works, which are the quintessence of Leninism in this epoch, which are the algebra of communist work in the course of all history.

. . . Comrade Stalin's report, which entered the treasury of world communism at the moment it was delivered here. . . deserves to be called the second program of the Party.

Stalin, like an attentive mother, always tried to keep Zinov'ev from misbehavior:

. . . after I was readmitted to the Party the first time. I once heard from the mouth of comrade Stalin the following comment. He told me: "You have been hurt and are being hurt in the eyes of the Party not so much by fundamental errors, as by your deviousness in relation to the Party over many years." (Many cries of "Right, properly said!") Absolutely right, comrades! That is how it was. And I hope that I have now thoroughly understood that comment.

Zinov'ev confessed with gusto the sin of his failure to denounce:

When Sten showed me the double-dyed, kulak, counter-revolutionary, rightist platform, instead of fulfilling the most elementary obligation of a member of the Bolshevik Party, instead of doing that, instead of demanding that Sten himself immediately inform the Central Committee of our Party of all that he knew, instead of that I kept Sten's secret, which in fact turned out to be the conspiracy of Riutin and Co., of the whole group, which is not worth mentioning from this rostrum.

Comrades, it would seem, I was punished by the Party a second time and entirely deservedly. And, comrades, I must speak of this entirely candidly, as I will speak always and everywhere, that this was my most serious mistake up till now.

Long-winded and inspired, the orator heaped filth on Trotskii. Nor did he spare himself. Again and again he praised Stalin. At the end he fell to his knees:

I have entirely and finally understood that if it were not for that leadership, for those iron cadres, which have led the Party into battle against all oppositions, than the Party, the country, the working class, Lenin's plans and the revolution itself would be threatened by greater dangers than they are. That leadership, which is revered by the people of our country and the working class, by all of the best people of our country and the working class of the whole world, saved us from that danger. (Applause)

(In his sycophantic zeal Zinov'ev did not notice that he insulted the working class by excluding it from the ranks of the "best people of our country". Neither did his listeners - but that is parenthetical.)

Kamenev, as in past years, followed Zinov'ev's line:

I have the sad duty at this congress of victors to present a chronicle of defeats, a demonstration of that chain of efforts, delusions and crimes to which every group and every individual is doomed who separates himself from the great teachings of Marx-Engels, of Lenin-Stalin, from the collective life of the party, from the directives of its leading institutions.<sup>25</sup>

On the Riutin group:

. . . the ideology of the Riutinists is as sawn-off as the shot guns the kulaks fired at the communists carrying out collectivization . . .

Different, more material weapons of influence were needed here, and they were applied to the very members of that

group, and to their accomplices and protectors, and entirely properly and justly they were applied to me.

Kamenev recalled an episode of 1928, when Bukharin, that man of principle, having just worked so hard to expel the Trotskyite-Zinov'evite opposition from the party, appealed to him, defeated and powerless as he was, to form a bloc against Stalin. Kamenev, by the way, wasted no time informing the Central Committee and was quickly reinstated in the party. Remembering that, he enjoyed covering the rightists with mud.

Kamenev did not spare repentance either, understanding that he would not be able to overdo that:

Comrades, I have expressed my deep regret for the mistakes I have made (Voice: You must not only express yourself, but justify yourself in the matter.) I want to say from this rostrum that I consider the Kamenev, who from 1925 to 1933 fought with the party and its leadership, a political corpse, and that I wish to go forward dragging behind myself in the biblical (excuse me) expression that old skin. (Laughter).

Toward the end came the obligatory hallelujah: "Long live our socialist country! Long live our, our great leader and commander comrade Stalin! (Applause.)"

The congress listened attentively to the speeches of Bukharin, Kamenev, Zinov'ev (only Kamenev was cued once and reminded of the time limit). They left the rostrum to applause. It would seem that sentimental memories, remnants of their former fame still clung to their names. It must be admitted that they spoke well and skillfully. But the content of the speeches is repugnant: the collapse of personality, denial of convictions, the ability to admit to errors which they had not made, the attempt to worm their way into

the audience's good graces, to assume the tone of the collective psychosis, their desire to ignore facts - are all thoroughly hypocritical and false.

Rykov and Tomskii were received differently. At the 14th and 15th Congresses Aleksei Ivanovich Rykov was met with prolonged applause and seen off with a thunderous ovation and the singing of the Party's anthem. Now the audience was cold and unfriendly. Twice he was interrupted to be reminded of regulations. Listeners yelled out rudely:

. . . By that member of the party leadership, who spoke out to defend that thesis of building socialism in one country .

. . . (Voice: That was comrade Stalin!). . .

I meant to describe the role of comrade Stalin in the period immediately after Vladimir Il'ich's death. (Voice from the hall: We know without your telling us!)<sup>26</sup> . . .

The comrades did not accept his repentance: "Peters has talked for an hour without saying anything!" He had not been applauded.

Neither was there applause for Tomskii, a recognized buffoon who had lost the wit he once had. He was received with extreme hostility. Peters, the well-known Chekist, twice demanded that he tell about Eismont and Smirnov, and acting chairman Postyshev cut Tomskii short although he had not been speaking long: "Comrade Tomskii, it is time to finish." Obviously upset, Tomskii hastened to put distance between himself and his arrested friend: "The party correctly judged my error, my closeness to Smirnov, which gave the counter-revolutionary Eismont-Smirnov group the opportunity and the basis to take refuge behind my name." Then he despondently descended from the rostrum.

Kirov who spoke after Tomskii to offer a conclusion to the speeches of the rightists, sneeringly compared the three former Politbiuro members to transport drivers.

. . . What is there left to do to all these people, who until today were on the train? (Applause, laughter.)

It would seem, comrades, that they were trying to push their way into the general celebration, to get back into step with our music, to join in our enthusiasm. But no matter how they try, it doesn't come off. (Applause, Laughter.)

Take Bukharin for example. In my opinion he sang as if from music, but his voice just wasn't the same. (Laughter, applause.) To say nothing of comrade Rykov and comrade Tomskii . . .<sup>27</sup>

Kirov said there was no place for them in the higher leadership: "and it seems to me, I do not wish to be a prophet, but it will be some time before this host of transport drivers joins our communist army. (Applause.)"

In the circumstances there was no need to prophesy. All had been already decided. The Rights were not returned to the general staff. Quite the opposite, they were demoted. At the congress they were elected not members but candidate members of the TsK.

For all that, Kirov could still not foresee his fate. Only ten months remained until he was to be murdered on Stalin's orders. For the time being he tried as hard as he could to please the great leader. His speech was specially titled "THE REPORT OF COMRADE STALIN - THE PROGRAM OF ALL OUR WORK." Kirov suggested that instead of approving, as usual, a detailed resolution on the political report of the TsK, the Congress approve Stalin's report in toto and accept its proposals to be carried out as Party law. In a joyous outburst the delegates jumped to their feet. Stalin came out on the platform only to decline, from modesty, a final word and to give the signal

for a tremendous ovation, which turned into the singing of the Internationale, at the end of which the ovation broke out with renewed vigor. When this collective demonstration and declamation quieted, on behalf of the Moscow, Leningrad, and Ukrainian delegations, Khrushchev formally repeated Kirov's suggestion. It was approved enthusiastically and became a customary part of all later congresses.

Let us return briefly to the former oppositionists. The Congress listened politely to the insignificant Lominadze. He left to applause. They were harder on Preobrazhenskii. He made a pitiful impression. Of the former polemicist and theoretician there remained only ruins. Although his theory of pitiless exploitation of the peasantry ("primary socialist accumulation") had become the foundation stone of official economic policy, it was impermissible to speak of it. All that remained for him was to cry into his vest, which had already gone out of party style. Preobrazhenskii tearfully repented. He smeared his Trotskyite past, Trotskii himself, and his past mistakes with black paint and common shit. He concluded with a deliberately stupid passage calculated to arouse indulgence and a favorable response:

. . . at the present time, more than ever I feel, more than ever I recognize the truth of the worker who advised me: if you don't thoroughly understand something, go with the party, vote with Il'ich. So much more, comrades, now when I am reexamining everything, when I have sufficiently recognized all my mistakes, I repeat these words of the worker to myself in a different stage of the revolution and say: vote with comrade Stalin, you won't be mistaken.<sup>28</sup>

The hall was silent. The trick did not work. Not long after, Kabakov, possibly with prompting, rebuked him from the rostrum:

. . . fundamentally wrong and inappropriate was the statement by Preobrazhenskii, when he said that he had to act as had the worker who apparently voted blindly for comrade Lenin's theses. It is untrue that the program put forth by Lenin and Stalin was ever accepted by workers who voted for those theses blindly. The workers voted for the theses of Lenin-Stalin then, as they do now, enthusiastically and with conviction. They accept enthusiastically the program presented at the 17th Congress by comrade Stalin because it expresses the proletarian program, the hopes and aspirations of the working class of the whole world. When a man who pretends to have achieved a certain theoretical level comes out on this rostrum and says that he has to vote for these theses blindly, then let us say plainly that this expresses entirely and thoroughly the spinelessness of a rotten intellectual. (Applause.)<sup>29</sup>

The speeches of Stalin's broken opponents were but drops in the swollen stream. The overwhelming majority of the remaining orators delivered speeches cut from a single pattern. Each began with a description of the unbearable pride he experienced looking at the mighty successes and victories gained under the wise leadership . . ., etc. Then, coming back to earth, they spoke of particular problems, some of which appeared to be unprecedented disorders. That was especially true of speeches dealing with railroads and industry. Very sensitive agrarian themes were treated more gingerly. Interestingly, this was the last congress at which the negative sides of reality were dealt



with so openly. In conclusion the speakers invariably soared to rarefied heights of pure optimism and exclaimed wishes for health and long life.

There were comic interludes in the great spectacle. One was played by the respected revolutionary Gleb Krzhizhanovskii. Having clambered up onto the platform, he began by saying he had been a member of the party for 42 years.<sup>30</sup> Then shaking with tender emotion he revealed other astonishing things. There was no need to be distressed, he told his comrades, that we had not yet outdistanced everyone else in the world. Bolsheviks possessed their own arithmetic and physics. "Every kilowatt of our station is twice as strong as its foreign counterpart." That was guaranteed by the authority of the Academy of Sciences. And that was little enough. In our socialist conditions every tractor has "six times the useful strength of tractors used by, say, farmers in North American United States." Therefore the 160,000 tractors enumerated at the end of the second five-year plan were equal to one million of theirs.<sup>31</sup>

Tukhachevskii's speech did not stand out at the congress, but we examine it because it helps clarify some subtleties of the army's relationship with Stalin. Most of the speech was routine. He spoke of the needs of the Red Army and of pretensions about industrialization. But it began. . .

The technical might of the Red Army grew in step with the construction of our industrial base. Comrade Voroshilov has reported on that with clarity and detail. . .

I want to add to that, that in the development of our technical might comrade Stalin not only played a general guiding role but also took a direct and daily part in selecting the necessary types of weapons and in putting them into production. Comrade Stalin not only outlined the

general tasks, especially concerning equipping the army with an air force, tanks, and long-range and rapid-firing artillery of the most modern sort, but he met with the organizers of production and worked out the practical and successful plans of production. . .

This work, this leadership created that technical might, which the Red Army possesses and which you will see again on parade.<sup>32</sup>

You heard right. He not only set out the general tasks, but personally created the technical might of the RKKA. None of the rest had happened. The 1927 report on the necessity to technically rearm the army, which was twice rejected and ridiculed by Stalin, did not exist. Nor the retirements of 1928. Nor the squabbles, insults, and intrigue which invariably accompanied any discussion of military questions with the General Secretary.<sup>33</sup>

Of course Tukhachevskii did not burn with love for Stalin. He too was a master strategist and tactician. Tukhachevskii accomplished a deep encircling movement and licked the great leader in an undefended sector. It is also possible that he was following the popular aphorism: "Military discipline is the ability to show the chief that you are stupider than he." Not only Stalin believed that...

The Congress was long and luxurious. The delegates were well entertained and not only in Moscow's theaters. On January 31 there was a mass meeting on Red Square, after which there passed before the delegates and guests of the Congress "a procession of workers from the plants and factories and the employees of the regions of Moscow, in which military units participated." On February 9, there was a parade of the troops of the Moscow garrison at noon, and in the evening elections to the TsK. It is hard to say why the military

was marched past the delegates on the eve of the elections - to calm, to encourage, or to frighten.

However that may have been, it all worked out according to Stalin's plan. One after another people pretending to be masters of the country and the future masters of the world climbed up on the rostrum to proclaim boundless praise: Stalin did this . . . Stalin did that . . . Stalin indicated . . . Stalin taught . . . Long live Stalin.

They thought they were making history. Stalin declined to make concluding remarks and grinned in his mustaches. For him they were already dead men. In his heart he had already buried them. He had reserved no place for them in the earthly heaven they were exalting.

